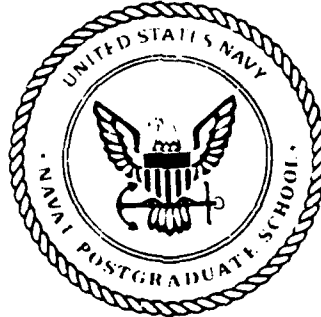


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## THESIS

AMERICAN PERSIAN GULF POLICY  
AFTER THE GULF WAR

by

Daniel F. Redmond

December 1992

Thesis Advisor:

Ralph H. Magnus

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American Persian Gulf Policy After the Gulf War

by

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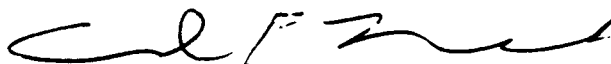
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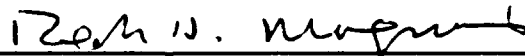
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## ABSTRACT

American policy in the Persian Gulf since the end of the Gulf War has dangerously overemphasized military instruments to protect United States interests in the region. This military focus suggests that threats to American interests are external and visible. At the same time it neglects the challenges posed to U.S. interests by internal political upheaval in the pro-American regimes of the Gulf Cooperation Council and ignores the societal disruptions associated with modernizing societies. Despite their considerable oil wealth, these polities will be increasingly vulnerable to instability if the regimes in power continue their monopoly on political power. Moreover, the highly visible and active presence of American armed forces in the Gulf today intensifies the perception of the U.S. as an imperial super power and unknowingly threatens to undermine the stability of the GCC states by providing opposition groups with a powerful symbol with which to challenge the political status quo.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

American policy in the Persian Gulf since the end of the Gulf War has dangerously overemphasized military instruments to protect United States interests in the region. This military focus suggests that threats to American interests are external and visible and neglects the challenges posed to those interests by internal political upheaval in the Persian Gulf Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Despite their considerable oil wealth, these polities will be increasingly vulnerable to instability if the ruling families continue their tight hold on political power. Moreover, the highly visible and active presence of American armed forces in the Gulf today intensifies the perception of the U.S. as an imperial superpower and unknowingly threatens to undermine the stability of the GCC states by providing opposition groups with a powerful symbol with which to challenge the political status quo.

The geographic isolation of the Arabian peninsula and conservative impact of history upon these societies rendered them particularly unprepared for the penetration of European powers and advent of oil in the past century. The process of modernization and development from deeply traditional family and tribal-based societies to "modern" societies is a turbulent evolution. As this transition has progressed throughout

the 20th century, old structures of traditional society are broken down and new social groups emerge demanding more say in the decision-making process of their political system. Invariably, this development is destabilizing.

The Arab states of the Arabian peninsula have been blessed with tremendous oil reserves and for the past 30 years have accumulated considerable wealth. Control of this wealth, concentrated in the hands of the ruling families of the GCC states, has enabled them to consolidate their political position by redistributing that wealth to the citizens of the nations. In other words, they have been able to "buy" political stability. It would be folly, however, for American policy makers to assume that economic prosperity equals political stability. The U.S. experience with Iran illustrates the potential consequences of this assumption.

Social groups, both new and traditional, are increasingly becoming politically aware and demanding more say in the political process of their countries. Whether the new middle class, Right-oriented and conservative Islamicists or even the large (but thus far politically docile) expatriate populations, these peoples will increasingly demand greater participation. To ignore this is a mistake.

Efforts by the ruling families of the GCC to expand political participation in their respective polities are not encouraging. The only electoral institution in existence today in the Gulf is Kuwait's recently elected parliament.



Efforts by other Gulf regimes to expand their system have received little more than lip service. Indeed, in recent years, the trend appears to be in the opposite direction and ruling families seem to be increasing their political monopoly.

If this continues, these new and traditional social groups will turn to other means to express their views. The toppling of other Middle Eastern monarchies by both pan-Arab nationalists or pan-Islamist nationalists demonstrates how these ideologies provide vehicles to mobilize political support in opposition to traditionally-based regimes. Despite the considerable philosophical divergence of these two ideologies, the one symbol they have been able to exploit with effect has been anti-imperialism.

The unprecedented peacetime expansion of American military power in the Gulf since the end of Desert Storm provides potentially destabilizing groups in pro-American GCC societies with a powerful symbol with which to oppose the ruling families. While each military action that we have conducted since the end of the war can be argued on its own merits, policy makers need to look at the whole picture and realize the image that it presents. It is an image of deep association between American military (imperial) power and the continued survival and prosperity of the ruling families. The destabilizing effect of such an image should not be underestimated.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Almost anything that we do in a foreign country produces side-effects, that is, consequences other than those explicit to the work itself, which in many cases are more important than the direct end result of our action. [Ref. 1:p. 209]

American policy in the Persian Gulf since the end of the Gulf War for Kuwait has dangerously overemphasized military instruments to protect United States interests in the region. Two important implications can be derived from this military focus. First, it assumes that the military forces can adequately protect U.S. interests and generally neglects the intensity of the internal problems associated with transitioning societies. These internal difficulties are often more hazardous to U.S. interests than the external challenges the military forces are designed to deter and counter. Second, the historic perception of the United States as an imperial super power is intensified by the highly visible and active presence of American armed forces in the Gulf today. This can contribute to the destabilization of the pro-American regimes of the Persian Gulf, and ultimately undermine the primary objective of U.S. policy--continued free flow of oil to the Western industrialized nations.

Historically, Western policy in the Middle East has tended to focus on overt, external challenges to its interests at the

neglect, intentional or otherwise, of more subtle threats. Simply stated, the overt threats were identified in military terms while internal disruptions tended to be more political and social in nature. At times, this policy has been appropriate. The British bilateral treaty arrangements with the Gulf Arab Shaykhdoms in the 19th century specifically guaranteed protection from external threats emanating either from the interior of the Arabian Peninsula or from Imperial Russian expansion south into the region. British policy, at the same time, generally avoided interfering with internal politics of those tribal societies and was successful well into the 20th century. [Ref. 2:p. 656]

The impact of Western power, oil and the subsequent modernization of these societies, however, ushered in dramatic changes affecting all aspects of Middle East life. The radical transformation in the region that resulted, created a wide variety of novel threats to Western interests. While some remained familiar (i.e., the Soviet Union), others proved less recognizable, pervasive and more subtle. British, and later American policy, in many ways failed to acknowledge these new challenges. In the 1950s, real difficulties began to emerge.

The 1950s witnessed a series of major attempts by Britain and the United States to bolster their strategic interests in the region. The means they chose closely involved Syria and exacerbated her domestic tensions. Each of these efforts failed and in the process served to accentuate anti-Western

sentiment in Syria and other Arab countries.  
[Ref. 3:p. 4]

Western efforts to establish a regional security pact designed to counter Soviet expansion into the Middle East failed to recognize political dynamics within individual countries as well as within the region as a whole. The specific force at work was Pan-Arab nationalism. The establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 as well as the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957--both directed toward a Communist threat--allowed Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia to become, in effect, open allies of the United States.

They were rewarded with American arms and money, but both they and their patrons paid the price of widespread protest and condemnation. This helped pave the way for the armed insurrection that plunged Lebanon into anarchy beginning in May 1958 and the military coup that liquidated the Iraqi monarchy two months later. [Ref. 3:p. 5]

Indeed, many observers have suggested that American preoccupation with the Soviet threat during this period undermined the original aim of the policy, and contributed to the spread of Soviet influences in the region and the turn of many Arab nations to the non-aligned movement.<sup>1</sup>

The American assumption of security responsibility in the Persian Gulf following the British withdrawal in 1971 resulted

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<sup>1</sup>See Seth Tillman's The United States in the Middle East, George Lenczowski's American Presidents and the Middle East, and Manfred Halpern's The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa.

in the establishment of the Twin Pillars policy. Deriving from the philosophy of the Nixon Doctrine and shaped by the American experience in Viet Nam, this structure rested on the two "pillars" of Saudi Arabia and Iran, and envisioned using those countries as military proxies for the United States to maintain stability and provide a bulwark against Soviet moves into the region. The problem was that it tended to neglect what was happening inside Iran and Saudi Arabia by concentrating on the external Soviet threat. Moreover, the strategy was actually undermining the very stability upon which Twin Pillars was founded, ultimately contributing to the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, as well as the disturbing seizure of the Holy Mosque in Mecca that same year by militant Islamicists. As Maya Chadda noted, "what undid Carter was not the Soviet Union in the final analysis, but domestic developments in U.S. proxies--Iran and Saudi Arabia in 1979...." [Ref. 4:p. 235]

To highlight American ignorance of what was happening domestically in Iran, President Carter, in December 1977, while visiting Teheran, made a statement praising Iran as "an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world." [Ref. 5:p. 188] Just a month later, the preliminaries of the revolution erupted marking the commencement of a long year of domestic revolt that culminated in the collapse of the monarchy in February 1979.

In the wake of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the Carter Doctrine was announced proclaiming that "any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." While the doctrine properly recognized a viable threat from Soviet adventurism, it set the tone for the turbulent decade to follow in the region that overemphasized the "outside" threat, to the neglect of "a far more likely scenario--that control or curtailment of oil supplies might be effected, not by an outsider, but rather by a belligerent insider, such as revolutionary Iran." [Ref. 6:p. 418]

The 1980s, indeed, proved a turbulent time for American interests in the Persian Gulf and saw policy makers reacting increasingly with military instruments. John Duke Anthony noted ominously in 1987 that

...the inclination of many in the Reagan Administration to down-play local initiatives in international crisis areas, and to use armed intervention when US interests have appeared indirectly or potentially threatened, does not bode well for what is at stake with regard to long-term American interests in the Gulf." [Ref. 6:p. 431]

Direct U.S. military involvement in the Gulf in the later stages of the Iran-Iraq war and, of course, the deployment of half-a-million men and women to the Arabian Peninsula following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, underline

Anthony's warning. Regardless of the military successes of both operations Earnest Will (Kuwaiti tanker re-flagging operation) and Desert Shield/Storm, the fact that those deployments had to be made in the first place, indicates a failure in policy.

Today, washed with the success of the liberation of Kuwait, it is easy to fall back into the comfortable idea that American military strength in the Persian Gulf, and Middle East in general, will adequately protect our vital interests in that region. That is, the need to secure oil reserves for Western industrialized nations. The United States, however, can ill-afford, politically and economically, to conduct large-scale deployments half-way around the world every three or four years to ensure those oil sources are protected. Further, this thinking refuses to acknowledge what the preceding brief review has attempted to suggest: that Western policy makers have consistently neglected to recognize the challenges that internal, domestic developments pose to U.S. interests, and focus, instead, on more tangible, outside and visible threats. This neglect, it is being argued, has contributed to the loss of many opportunities and forced policy makers to react with military instruments that often serve only to undermine and convolute their ultimate objective.

American policy today in the Persian Gulf is threatening to make the same mistake. The overt military embrace with the

Gulf Arab regimes is unprecedented and, as before, refuses to recognize, or even attempt to ascertain what such an embrace might be doing to the political base and legitimacy of the pro-American regimes in power. The validity of the policy should not be assumed by the current perceived eagerness of these governments to embrace American power. Indeed, if Iraq's King Faisal or Iran's Reza Shah had fully appreciated the impact of their pro-western stance on their internal domestic position, their heirs may well be in power today. King Hussein's agile political maneuvering and arms length approach to the West has maintained his position on the Jordan throne for nearly four decades despite severe internal and external challenges to his legitimacy during that time.

While the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have traditionally been the most stable of all the Middle East countries, it would be tragic if the U.S. repeated the same mistake as it did with Iran and others, all because policy makers assumed that the friendly regimes were stable and that their policies were not undermining that stability. There are many elements within these societies, both new and traditional, that may see an opportunity to advance their position by taking advantage of the confusion and difficulties that characterize a transitioning and modernizing nation. Regardless of the ideology they adopt, be it Islamism, Pan-Arabism or even liberalism, the one factor that has historically brought opposition forces together in this



region, has been anti-imperialism. A failure to recognize this and the impact that our overt, military-oriented policy could have on the regimes in power, can only result in continued difficulty.

For this thesis, the primary American objective in the Persian Gulf is to ensure the free flow of oil to the Western industrialized nations.<sup>2</sup> [Ref. 6:p. 431.] In order to maintain this goal, the stability and current political and economic policies of the Gulf Arab states should be continued and strengthened. Political instability in these countries, with the potential for revolution, is considered to be a major threat to this American objective.

This thesis will first examine the traditional societies of the Arabian peninsula, the impact of foreign influences and the process of modernization, with a particular emphasis on group assimilation and political participation. This chapter will demonstrate the disruptive and often chaotic nature of transitioning societies to understand the destabilizing political impact that emerging social groups, with raised expectations and increased awareness, have upon the internal politics of the society. The next chapter will discuss efforts by the GCC polities to increase political participation within the decision making process, as well as

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<sup>2</sup>See John Duke Anthony's essay, "The Persian Gulf: Stability, Access to Oil, and Security," pp. 415-418, in Peter J. Chelkowski and Robert J. Pranger, Eds., Ideology and Power in the Middle East, Duke University Press, 1988.

examine some of the broad groups in these societies that are, or potentially will, demand greater say in the government. A failure to assimilate these groups will make them more vulnerable to radical ideologies, Left or Right, that mobilize populist support with symbology. Most often this is anti-imperialism. The last main chapter will detail events since the Gulf War to show the overemphasis of the military component of American policy and how that overemphasis is being perceived in the Middle East. That perception can be used by social groups in these societies to mobilize support in opposition to the pro-American ruling families, ultimately undermining the political stability of these societies.

## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT AND STABILITY

The rates of social mobilization and the expansion of political participation are high; the rates of political organization and institutionalization are low. The result is political instability and disorder. The primary problem of politics is the lag in the development of political institutions behind social and economic change. [Ref. 7:p. 5]

With the demise of the Soviet Union and consequent end of the Cold War, American policy makers are finally free to examine the developing world without the blinders of East-West competition. Policy makers may now be able to objectively view the problems in Third World countries and understand their continuing difficulties more in the context of social upheaval associated with the transition of traditional societies to modern societies, and less in the context of anti-communism. Indeed, political, social and economic modernization represents the real source of challenges to American interests in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. That discontented elements in these transitioning societies adopt Marxism or Islamic Fundamentalism to combat pro-western regimes--internally and externally--makes little difference in the end if they are successful. Ideologies, Left or Right, are appealing because they apply symbols to discontented individuals and groups in societies that allow them to understand the problems that derive from social

upheaval. Since the Second World War, the symbol most often used to mobilize these groups in society has been anti-Westernism or anti-imperialism.

This chapter will demonstrate the inherent instability associated with the transition of a traditional Middle Eastern society to a modern society. It will begin with a brief historic and sociopolitical overview to show the insular and conservative nature of pre-20th century Arabian societies. We will then examine the process of modernization to provide a social and political framework for transitioning societies to apply to specific historic factors that impacted upon the Arabian peninsula. After illustrating how these factors contributed to the development of the absolute monarchies, we will conclude with some specific problems associated with modernizing regimes of this kind.

#### **A. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND**

The Arabian Peninsula has, throughout history, been relatively untouched by the great events and empires that have existed on its periphery. This is particularly true of the interior, and thus the impact of these foreign influences on Arabian society has been minimal. [Ref. 8:p. 285] The extremely inhospitable environment that characterizes the peninsula, combined with the geographic location of the region with respect to the great cultures and powers of pre-20th century history, has been responsible for the insular nature

of Arabia. Whether thrusting "like a thick wedge" between Egypt and Babylonia [Ref. 9:p. 32], standing between the great Byzantine and Persian empires, or on the frontier of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties, the region has escaped the physical conquest and cultural influence of these contending societies. Attempts by Roman, Persian and Ottoman empires to extend control over the peninsula generally ended in failure. [Ref. 8:p. 284].

This is not to say that the region existed completely in a vacuum. Territories on the rim engaged in considerable trade with the outside world. On the western edge, along the coast of the Red Sea, the great Incense Trail carried frankincense, spices and myrrh from southern Arabia, or Arabia Felix, to the Levant along the Mediterranean coast. The great cities of Mecca and Medina acquired significant trading status long before their fame as the birthplace of Islam became prominent.

In the east, along the coastline of the Persian Gulf, the communities were more oriented toward the sea, and have enjoyed a long tradition of intercontinental communication. [Ref. 8:p. 284] Bahrain has a history as an entrepot between the Indus Valley and the Sumerian city of Ur (southern Iraq) going back more than 5000 years. [Ref. 10:p. 2] With the advent of Islam, in addition to advancements in navigation and shipbuilding, Persian Gulf peoples opened extensive trading links with Africa and the Far East. The "Arabs remained the

leading sailors and traders throughout the Indian Ocean to the end of the fifteenth century and the coming of the Portuguese." [Ref. 10:p. 3]

The rise of Islam, out of the western edge of the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century, represents one of the most far-reaching events in history. Its impact upon the Middle East alone as a unifying force, is considerable, giving rise to the great Islamic empires under Ummayyad and Abbasid rule, as well as Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Dynasties. Interestingly, however, the center of these Islamic polities shifted quickly to the more cosmopolitan centers of Syria and the Fertile Crescent, leaving the peoples of the Arabian peninsula to their traditional nomadic and tribal ways. As C.A.O. Van Nieuwenhuijze noted in Sociology of the Middle East, "Arabia has at an early date in Islamic history become somewhat marginal to the Arab world and to the Middle East. Until fairly recently, it was a bit of a sociocultural museum, with relative inaccessibility as its main device for conservation." [Ref. 8:p. 285.]

#### 1. European Penetration

While the hinterland of the peninsula would remain relatively isolated until the 20th century, the Arab peoples inhabiting the coastline of the Persian Gulf began to experience foreign penetration nearly 400 years earlier. In the early 16th century, the Portuguese began to penetrate the area through both commercial and military means. As early as

1507, they had established themselves in Bahrain and remained until driven out by the Safavids in 1602. Portuguese preeminence was displaced by the Dutch, and ultimately the British, following a century-long commercial rivalry between the latter two European powers.

The primary British interest in the region, however, increasingly concerned the protection of her lines of communication with her Indian empire. This concern intensified with the rising Russian threat to Persia and Afghanistan in the 18th century, as well as Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Reacting to the increasing perception of challenges to her trade routes with India, in addition to a disruptive local pirate problem within the Gulf itself, the British role within that body of water expanded during the 19th century. [Ref. 10:p. 5] The main intent of British activities in the Gulf was to ensure peace and stability in order to allow her commercial activities to progress unencumbered--a goal not unlike Western desires today. [Ref. 8:p. 298]

To do this, Britain was forced initially to demonstrate her military power on several occasions during the first two decades of the 19th century. Following several raids on local tribal entities in the lower Gulf, Britain negotiated a number of agreements to suppress piracy, prevent slave traffic curb arms smuggling and of course promote peaceful trade. [Ref. 2:p. 655] In 1869, a treaty was concluded with the shaykhdoms of the lower Gulf, known as the

Trucial States, that established a de facto protectorate relationship with Britain. The rulers agreed to allow Britain to handle all external affairs and "undertook not to cede territory or grant any concessions to powers and individuals other than Britain." These two principles were formalized in the exclusivity clause and the nonalienation clause. Similar agreements were negotiated in 1880 and 1899 with Bahrain and Kuwait, respectively. [Ref. 2:p. 655] As noted, the peace-keeping consideration was the primary aim of the strategy. Van Nieuwenhuijze has commented, as have others, that "perhaps an unintended result was a largely conservative impact so far as internal affairs were concerned." [Ref. 8:p. 298]

At this point, British interest in the Gulf still remained tied to the protection of her lines of communication with India. With the dawn of the 20th century, and the discovery of oil, the geopolitical position of the Gulf began to shift. Gradually, the Gulf took on an intrinsic value of its own and Britain, particularly following World War I, became more deeply involved in the region. Clearly the impact of British dominance in the region is considerable. The specifics of that impact upon the political and social development of its shaykhdoms will be examined later in this chapter.

## 2. Wahhabis and the Rise of the Saudis

The hinterland and western regions of the peninsula, as noted earlier, were largely untouched by the competition



that European powers were increasingly waging in the Middle East. There was, however, an internal movement whose influence impacted critically upon the future of the peninsula. In the 18th century, while the British and Dutch were struggling for commercial dominance in the Gulf, there arose from the Najd region in central Arabia, a puritanical religious movement known as Wahhabism. Its founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1787), teamed up with Muhammad ibn Saud, the chieftain of a tiny village that received Abdul Wahhab, and together spread the new doctrine and their personal power. Having achieved the conquest of central and eastern Arabia by the turn of the century, the family of Saud began to encroach upon Ottoman territory in Iraq and in the Hijaz. The Ottoman Porte, disturbed by the success of this fundamentalist movement, dispatched Egyptian Sultan, Muhammad Ali, to crush the upstart family. Following a decade of campaigning, the power of the Saud family was reduced and remained dormant for nearly a century.

In 1901, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, son of the exiled family leader, took up the banner of Wahhabism and reconquered Riyadh. By 1913, he had consolidated control over the Nejd and the al Hasa region of the peninsula in the east. During World War I, ibn Saud agreed with the British to remain neutral and not attack the Hashemite clan in the Hijaz, which was revolting against the Ottomans with British assistance. [Ref. 2:p. 574] Following the war, however, longstanding

tensions between the two clans erupted, resulting in sporadic warfare that lasted for five years and ended with the Saud conquest of the Hijaz, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The final militant expansion of the Sauds ended in 1934 with the conquest of Asir, just north of Yemen. This marked what essentially represents the borders of present-day Saudi Arabia.

### 3. Oil

The discovery of oil in the beginning of the century coincided with increasing European involvement in the Middle East and gradually overwhelmed all other strategic interests in terms of importance. For the traditional societies of the Arabian Peninsula, this new-found resource meant the sudden and tremendous acquisition of wealth. With this wealth, however, came the increased penetration of the West with all its social, political and ideological baggage that further aggravated and accelerated the disrupting process of modernization. For the very conservative Saudi Arabian society that had for centuries existed untouched by the outside world, the experience was bound to be dynamic and potentially destabilizing.

Bahrain was the first Gulf entity to begin producing and exporting oil in the 1930s. It was not until after World War II, however, that the Gulf nations and Saudi Arabia began to produce in earnest. [Ref. 11:p. 318] In addition to the effects that oil had upon these young nations as developing

and modernizing societies, the advent of oil in the Gulf region ushered in the United States for the first time in Middle Eastern history. American oil companies obtained concessions early in both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, sometimes to the chagrin of the British overlords. [Ref. 2:p. 670] The relationship that developed between these companies and their host governments--particularly Saudi Arabia--gradually evolved into increased American government interest in the region, ultimately, of course, replacing Great Britain as the preeminent power.

This brief history of the Arabian peninsula suggests an area, prior to the turn of this century, relatively isolated from external influences--particularly the interior. Even the protectorate system instituted by the British in the 19th century interfered little with the traditional way of life along the Persian Gulf littoral. Indeed, it served to conserve rather than alter these societies. These societies were also relatively unprepared socially or politically to tackle the problems associated with the penetration of the West at the turn of the century.

#### **B. TRADITIONAL SOCIETY IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA**

Several generalizations can be made about the basic societal and political structure that characterized traditional society in the Arabian peninsula. This framework

is important because this structure is deeply ingrained in the cultural tradition that has remained relatively unchanged for centuries prior to the introduction of modernization in the 20th century.

### 1. The Family

The basic social unit in traditional Middle Eastern society is the extended family, not the individual. Van Nieuwenhuijze notes that "to the Middle Eastern perception of what is a social unit and of how units interrelate, the family is the base line rather than the individual persons who are its physical constituents." [Ref. 8:p. 381] Van Nieuwenhuijze goes on to explain three considerations of this concept that impact upon the basic operation and structure of the family.

First, marriage in traditional societies is primarily and mainly a family affair. Rather than the joining of two individuals, the importance of the event lies in the continuity of the family. "Think of the institutionalization of marriage arrangements and rituals, in which bride and groom are basically passive up to, or even including, the moment of giving their consent." [Ref. 8:p. 385] Indeed, marriage was and is often used for political purposes. The second consideration is that women generally count for less than men. This is seen in the "emphatically patriarchal" nature of families. This male dominance as head of the family also translates to society as a whole. "Operationally speaking,

the family father is the fountain-head of authority and decisionmaking. In this regard, he can be depicted as embodying the family in respect of society at large". [Ref. 8:p. 386] Finally, the traditional family is extended, not nuclear. The extended family acts in many ways as a self-contained social unit that attends to all the needs of its members.

The family father together with his wife...or wives shares the home with his male and unmarried female children and the wives and children of his sons. Traditional life expectations being what they are, this normally results in three generations living together in a compound home. In addition to being a biological complex, the family is several other things too. It is an economic unit, for production as well as consumption purposes and also for the processing that links the two together. The self-supporting family has only limited needs that must be met from outside. Subsistence...is a decisive factor in this connection. Internally, the family is also a unit in terms of authority-wielding: the base line of sociopolitical powers. [Ref. 8:p. 386]

In a culture that places the family above the individual, men above women, and the family as the base line unit socially and economically, it is not difficult to imagine what concepts such as democracy--which emphasizes the individual--and modernization--which radically alters the economic environment--may do to the basic socioeconomic structure of the society.

## 2. The Tribe

If the family forms the basic traditional social unit of the Arabian peninsula, then the tribe serves as the basic political unit. The tribal segment of the Arabian peninsula

has traditionally dominated the society socially, economically and politically. The tribes were typically united through tribal alliances that transcended independent regions or states. [Ref. 12:p. 432] Although tribal society exists in both urban and nomadic communities (this is particularly true of the Persian Gulf region), it "is at its 'purist' not in the city or village, but amongst pastoral nomads of mountain and desert." The very nature of nomadic wanderings, combined with the vast array of tribal alliances prevalent throughout the peninsula, suggests that the concept of territoriality in the Western sense would be completely alien to this society. [Ref. 8:pp. 395-397.]

Power, in traditional tribal society, is decentralized, has limited central authority and is egalitarian in nature. [Ref. 13:p. 6] The traditional foundations of the legitimacy of ruling families within a tribe are based on concepts of power-sharing and Islam as represented in the Sharia (Islamic Law). [Ref. 13:p. 8] Two sociopolitical tribal customs derive from this decentralized, egalitarian philosophy, and are important in understanding the manner in which Gulf rulers today try to couple traditional principles with democratic concepts. The first is the idea of public session, or majlis. Theoretically, any individual citizen is granted personal access to the ruler and has the opportunity for immediate redress of his grievance. Consultation, or shura, is the second concept which requires the ruler to

consult with community leaders to reach a consensus prior to acting on a particular issue. [Ref. 14:p. 299]

Finally, the tribally-organized segment of society has maintained control over major economic resources such as pearls, dates, or presently oil. [Ref. 12:p. 432] With respect to wealth in general, the identity of ruler and ruled was such that traditionally "their wealth is his and vice versa." There was, in effect, a lack of distinction between the ruler's funds and the public coffers. [Ref. 8:p. 289]

### 3. Kinship

It should come as no surprise that in a society which revolves around the family, loyalty to ancestry and the importance of blood relations generally come above all else. Kinship in the traditional society of the Arabian peninsula is the construct which defines social relationships both within the family and the tribe, and means above all that these relationships are highly personalized. "Kinship links individuals in a family, it is the means to conceptualize social patterns and relationships." [Ref. 8:p. 382] The tribal society "is the kind of society where social structure is primarily and consistently envisaged in terms of kinship." [Ref. 8:p. 399] Indeed, kinship permeates all aspects of tribal relations. "Tribesmen...manipulate kinship principles to regulate marriage, social interaction, and the redistribution of power, force, wealth, and benefits." [Ref. 12:p. 432]

If kinship dominates social and political relations within the traditional society, then the idea of a state in the Western sense (which involves the institutionalized control over men with whom one has no ties of kinship), is alien to this society. "A tribe was organized by lines and obligations of blood. In its patriarchal egalitarianism, it required no institutions of state." [Ref. 15:p. 12]

#### 4. Islam

Kinship is not the only means of defining social and political relationships in the traditional society. Islam, as a religion, has predominated in the Middle East since its rise in the 7th century. Some have suggested this was in part a reaction to the decadence of tribal society. [Ref. 8:p. 462] Where kinship defines relations within tribes and families, Islam offers something similar, but goes beyond mere groups to a larger Community of Believers (umma). In its ideal, "Islam designates...not only a religion but also a community and a way of life." [Ref. 15:p. 5] The ideal "way of life" is expressed through the Shari'a. The Shari'a is a comprehensive system of morality which evolved from the Quran and hadith (practices of the Prophet). As the statement of God's will, it is supreme in all aspects of society, and, in principle, removes the realm of legislation from the competence of the ruler. [Ref. 16:p. 5] In other words, in its revealed form, it represents a perfect system of political and societal organization.



Islam and the Community of Believers (umma) can be seen as an attempt to supersede pre-Islamic units, such as the tribe. While it failed in displacing traditional societal units of living, it was successful in superimposing these units. [Ref. 8:p. 462]

The great majority who became Muslims in Muhammad's lifetime and thereafter...were not individual converts but families and tribes who made the decision to join the larger community of Islam on the basis of their own customary solidarity. Alongside the demand for the unity of all Believers, there were...these other organized and competing claims for loyalty." [Ref. 15:p. 6]

The rise of the Umayyad tribe (a tribe from Mecca that had opposed Muhammad and his message initially) to assume the Caliphate and establish the first Islamic dynasty, illustrates this point. By placing

...all loyalties and relationships under the authority of one God, Islam reinforced a more ancient test of political legitimacy--the ruler's ability to protect the moral and physical integrity of the Middle East's most immediate and enduring community--the kinship group. [Ref. 15:p. 14]

For the first two centuries following the death of Muhammad in 632 A.D., the ulama (religious scholars), using reasoned interpretations (ijtihad) of the Quran and hadith as well as consensus (ijma), were able to form a body of law that was adaptable to various aspects of society not specifically addressed by Muhammad. This process gave Islam a flexibility that would allow it to adapt and evolve with the changing requirements of life. In the 10th century, however, fearful that the spirit of the corpus of law was being corrupted by

the growth of sectarian movements, regional dynasties and philosophical speculations, the ulama closed the gate to individual interpretation of the Shari'a, effectively stagnating Islam's ability to grow and adapt with time. "Islamic society thus lingered basically unchanged until the 19th century, and was especially unprepared to meet the challenge of the modern age." [Ref. 15:p. 34]

Prior to the establishment of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, Islamic history was characterized by the rise and fall of various Islamic dynasties. From this pattern there developed a relationship between the ruler and ulama that essentially ensured the survival of each, but further served to cement Islam in the 10th century. For the ulama, it was a choice between anarchy and the acknowledgment of the existing authority, of which they chose the latter in the interest of the greater good. In doing so, however, they joined into a partnership with political authority, lending ideological legitimacy to often tyrannical and rather un-Islamic regimes. [Ref. 15:p. 17] The result was a societal and political system that legitimized authority of the status quo and was ill-prepared to flex and adapt to the dynamic challenges of Western penetration and modernization.

In orthodox Islam, the believer has been given rules to guide his entire conduct by a God so powerful that only submission is possible. In his immediate social world, loyalty to family ideally reigned supreme over truth or self in any judgment. In response to tyranny and anarchy in the political realm, bending with the wind became the habit of survival. [Ref. 15:p. 220]

Within the community of Islam, there have been many sectarian divisions throughout history. The most significant in the Peninsula, and Middle East in general, is the Sunni-Shi'a schism. The origin of the split lies in a political dispute over succession to the Prophet but ultimately evolved into disagreements over doctrine, law and custom. [Ref. 16:p. 3] The Sunnis (orthodox) represent the vast majority of Muslims worldwide (about 90 percent) and in the context of the Middle East dominate the Arab nations including the Arabian peninsula. The Shi'is, on the other hand, constitute about ten percent of all Muslims and for historic reasons, reside primarily in Iran. However, there is a slight Shi'a majority in Iraq and significant communities can be found in Lebanon and along the western coast of the Persian Gulf. In fact, considerable percentages of the population in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are Shi'a. [Ref. 17:p. xvi]

Historically, conflict between the two sects has often been bitter, and religious ideology has been adopted often in pursuit of geopolitical aims. The numerous wars between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Safavid Empire in the 16th century, as well as the most recent Iran-Iraq war, can be viewed in some ways as a Sunni-Shi'i confrontation. Further, Shia tradition is replete with a history of repression and persecution at the hands of Sunni caliphs. Indeed, the Shia experience in Sunni lands, including the Arabian peninsula, has reinforced this persecuted outlook. Notwithstanding this,

however, it is important to note that there also exists a sense of community between the Sunnis and Shi'is that is "based on the profound conviction of Muslims that to live together in unity" they must be able to see past doctrinal disputes. [Ref. 16:p. 4] This is particularly true when Muslims face threats from outside their community.

Finally, any discussion on religion in traditional Arabia must include a brief note on the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. As noted earlier, this fundamentalist brand of Islam emerged from the hinterland of the Nejd region in the Arabian peninsula in the late 18th century. These "unitarians" adhered strictly to a rigid doctrine that rejected all innovations introduced into Islam after the closing of the ijtiḥād in the 10th century. Intolerant and extremist, this militant form of Islam attacked all those, including other orthodox Sunnis, who did not subscribe to their beliefs. [Ref. 18:pp. 229-231.] Shi'is in particular have historically been a favorite target of Wahhabi ferocity. [Ref. 19:p. 77]

The clear success of the Saud-Wahhab alliance can be attributed to the nature of the relationship. The Wahhabi movement provided the Sauds with an ideology that raised their political position clearly above that of competing tribes. Exclusive and tributary in nature, the Sauds were able to form a structure that established an absolute monopoly of power for their family at the expense of other tribes and families. While this diminished the political position of these excluded

families, their social position was maintained through tribute, thus allowing the Sauds to retain a traditional desert alliance that further enhanced their legitimacy as absolute rulers. [Ref. 19:pp. 76-85] This structure essentially remains in place today.

Traditional society in the Arabian peninsula can be characterized as a conservative tribally and family-based structure. The two main systems that provide a framework for both political and social relationships are clearly kinship and religion. Given the conservative and isolated nature of the Arabian peninsula throughout history, it is not surprising that a traditional fundamentalist movement such as Wahhabism could survive, and indeed, thrive in such a society. How this society, and the other monarchical societies of the Persian Gulf deal with the challenges of modernization will be dealt with in the next chapter. Before examining this question, however, it is useful to review some general theories on transitioning societies.

### **C. MODERNIZATION**

Modernization, as the term implies, is the transition of a traditional society to a new, "modern" society. Monte Palmer, in his work on political development, characterizes traditional societies as being "family-based barter economies ...which seldom provide goods and services beyond the level of bare subsistence." Their political systems are dominated by

"family-based tribal chieftains...who perform all necessary political functions." Traditional cultures, such as religion and tradition, "justify established social, economic, and political patterns...and reinforce the perpetuation of the traditional social order by stressing values of passivity, fatalism and conformity." [Ref. 20:p. 43]

Modern societies, Palmer continues, have "highly differentiated industrial economies which...create surplus of goods and services sufficient to provide most members of society with a standard of living well in excess of mere subsistence." The political systems are "differentiated organizational structures" that perform all political functions, "including the articulation of mass demands, rule making, rule administration, and rule adjudication." Modern cultural systems use "ideological appeals to democracy, communism, or national destiny" to justify established patterns and stress "values of political participation, achievement, creativity," etc. Of particular concern to this study, Palmer observes that "mass political participation in traditional societies is minimal, mass participation in modern societies is intense." [Ref. 20:p. 43]

The impetus for this change and desire to transition from a traditional, secure and stable society to an unknown, disruptive, modern society is caused primarily by external factors. In our case, the penetration of the West first for strategic than economic reasons, in the 20th century was the

major catalyst for the disruption of the traditional, relatively isolated societies that had existed for centuries oblivious of the changes swirling about them. Two world wars, oil and the tremendous technological advances in communications all contributed to the introduction of disrupting factors into these societies. The increasing presence of foreigners in the Arabian peninsula, whether businessmen, military advisors or educators, accelerated the spread of new ideas about politics, religion and economics. At the same time, oil had created an industrial segment of society that required sources of labor, resources and administration, not to mention the tremendous wealth that accompanied these other changes. The principle aspects of modernization created by this invasion of foreign influences include urbanization, industrialization, secularization, democratization, education and media participation. [Ref. 7:p. 32] In the Arabian peninsula, these aspects have proceeded along at varying speeds and in some cases may be only barely apparent. The important thing is that these are the types of transformations that characterize a modernizing society. It is also significant to note that these same revolutions were experienced by the West but took place over four or five centuries. When one considers that this process in the Arabian peninsula has only been underway for six or seven decades, the magnitude of the problems and instability associated with it begins to become apparent.

The traditional society in our case was described above and characterized as being a relatively fixed political and societal structure with its relationships being defined through kinship and religion. In such a world, the individual is most often resigned to his place in the society believing, fatefully, that he has no ability to affect change. In a modern world, or at least a modernizing one, the individual begins to feel a political consciousness of his own and believes that he may in fact be able to influence change. Samuel Huntington has noted that "Traditional man expected continuity in nature and society and did not believe in the capacity of man to change or control either. Modern man, in contrast, accepts the possibility of change and believes in its desirability." [Ref. 7:p. 32]

Essentially, the individual is becoming politicized, or socially mobilized. Karl Deutsch defined social mobilization "as the process in which major clusters of old social, economic, and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behavior." [Ref. 21:p. 493] The social "rules" that dictated social and political behavior in the traditional society are being challenged by both individuals and groups whose lives have been turned upside down by modernization. For instance, the whole idea of democracy, with its emphasis on the individual, undermines the position of the family as the primary social unit, and the tribe as the primary



political unit in traditional society. Contemporary social change "will enhance, indeed widen, the occurrence of individualism, at the expense of group-belongingness." [Ref. 8:p. 384] Kinship, as a defining rule of behavior, would theoretically suffer as well. As the loyalty to family or tribe begins to diminish, "it is likely that those...having gone through something like an individualization process, may prove more readily amenable" to give loyalty to a cause, than "those who remain within the traditional shelter of the extended family." [Ref. 8:p. 394] Thus, a situation develops where increasingly more people become available for political mobilization.

At the same time, the spread of information through a more active and expanded media, as well as foreign businessmen, educators and politicians, creates greater awareness of an individual's position relative to others in the society. Expectations are raised as traditional man becomes conscious of the vast improvements in his condition that can be achieved in the modern world. Consequently, when these expectations are not met, the individual begins to seek other means to improve his condition in society, be it economically, politically or socially.

Social groups and economic classes, both old and new, will similarly experience raised expectations and will be vulnerable to the appeal of various ideological movements that seek to improve or maintain their respective positions in

society. As Huntington notes, "modernization creates new social groups and new social and political consciousness in old groups." [Ref. 7:p. 167] These politically conscious groups and individuals promoting their own parochial interests and infused with new ideologies, will invariably demand an increased say in the governing of society. If the political system cannot be expanded to assimilate these groups into society, they present disruptive and destabilizing elements in the modernizing process. Indeed, if they are considered by the existing system as illegitimate, then they may feel no other choice than to question the legitimacy of the ruling regime and seek its overthrow. It is the challenge of expanding power in the system to assimilate newly mobilized groups that is the primary concern of modernizing nations. [Ref. 7:p. 146]

In the Middle East, the two most prominent ideologies that have attracted various groups, both assimilated and not assimilated in the 10th century, are nationalism and Islamicism. Nationalism, both Pan-Arab and particularist, has been most useful for competing groups to use during the modernization process to garner support and further interests. A Western concept, nationalism has a populist appeal to those trying to deal with the disruption, upheaval and anxiety that is created by the societal transformation. Ernest Gellner, in Nations and Nationalism, explains that,

...as the tidal wave of modernization sweeps the world, it makes sure that almost everyone...has cause to feel unjustly treated, and that he can identify the culprits as being of another 'nation.' If he can also identify enough of the victims as being of the same 'nation' as himself, a nationalism is born. [Ref. 22:p. 112]

Further, it is vague and flexible enough to incorporate a wide variety of economic or political programs. E.J. Hobsbawm notes that nationalism's "very vagueness and lack of programmatic content gives it a potentially universal support within its community." [Ref. 23:p. 169] Manfred Halpern similarly argues that nationalism is popular because it makes few specific demands on its adherents. "Nationalism can assert itself without at the same time demanding loyalty to any particular form of government or society, economic organization or values, or any particular religious belief." [Ref. 15:p. 207]

World War I and its aftermath witnessed the emergence of Arab nationalism from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. In most cases its political and intellectual leaders had adopted it as a means to further or maintain their own interests. The populist appeal described above enabled these leaders to mobilize significant mass support for their cause. The Arab Revolt in the Hijaz in 1916 can be seen as a reaction to increasing Ottoman centralizing policies that tended to undermine the power and influence of Sharif Hussein and his Hashemite clan. The adoption of nationalist ideology by Hussein's sons, Faisal and Abdullah, in Iraq and Jordan, it

has also been argued, was simply the best means in which to maintain their own position.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Arab notables in greater Syria following the war used nationalist ideology, both Pan Arabist and particularist, in order to secure their traditional hold on political power.<sup>2</sup> The rise of a new middle class in the Middle East during the interwar period resulted in the emergence of a more radical form of nationalism that challenged the monarchical regimes in the 1950s and saw the overthrow of those regimes in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Libya. Whether Nasserist or Ba'thist, these new, more radical forms of Pan-Arab nationalism represented the ideological vehicle of a new elite attempting to gain power and further their own interests.

Throughout the history of Arab nationalism, the underlying theme that predominates through all forms of the ideology is a resistance to an alien power or culture, most often colonialism and the West. Revolts in Iraq in the early 1920s, Arab resistance to Jewish immigration in Palestine in the 1930s and the Egyptian revolution in 1952, just to mention a few, occurred under the nominal aegis of anti-imperialism.

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<sup>1</sup>See essays by William Ochsenwald and Mary Wilson (Chapters 9 and 10) in Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon, eds., The Origins of Arab Nationalism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup>See Ernest C. Dawn, From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism, Durham: Duke University Press, 1988; see also Muhammad Y. Muslih, The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Anti-imperialism served as a powerful symbol to mobilize popular support. The blows delivered to Arab nationalism during the Arab Cold War and the devastating loss to Israel in 1967, saw the demise of Pan-Arabism as a viable ideology for elites to use. Parallel to this, western origins and the secular nature of nationalism came under increasing intellectual attack. [Ref. 24:Chapter 1]

What nationalist ideology had failed to address was the societal crisis of modernization that gave rise to the challenge to Arab society in the first place. "The popular classes that had been initiated into the supranational appeal of pan-Arabism remained available for mobilization in the name of revolutionary pan-Islam." [Ref. 25:p. 508] Thus, in the wake of the demise of Arab nationalism, a new ideology was adopted. This ideology focused more acutely on the problems associated with the penetration of the West into Middle Eastern society, because it was based in the culture itself and could justifiably claim it was the true answer to the challenges posed by modernization and development. Rather than an attack from the political Left, as the nationalist ideologies had been, Islamicism came from the Right. In many ways it is far more pervasive and dangerous for regimes attempting to modernize because it questions the very foundations of development based on Western political and economic values. The themes,

...the power of the foreigner in Muslim life, the wicked ways of the privileged, the sanctity of the disinherited who rise up to inherit the earth free from the hold of oppressors, the right of Islam to rule and to dispense with secular governments of the monarchic and republican varieties... [Ref. 24:p. 11]

are explosive indeed.

Thus, throughout the modernizing process of the 20th century, ideologies have been used by contending elites to mobilize disaffected groups and individuals in order to further or maintain influence and power in society. For the developing regime, the problem is one of being able to assimilate these new social groups into the political process. If they are unable to do this, then they will face increasing challenges to their legitimacy to rule the society. Also noteworthy is the continuing theme of anti-imperialism that pervades the adopted ideologies, whether Left or Right. This fact has important implications for the regimes in power and the manner in which Western nations deal with those regimes.

For the Arab monarchical regimes of the Arabian peninsula, this problem is exacerbated because of their traditional basis of legitimacy and the manner in which these regimes came to power.

#### **D. IMPACT OF COLONIALISM AND OIL**

British imperialism and the discovery of oil in the 20th century were the two major factors that broke the traditional social and political structure of Arabian society. The primary impact of these two developments was to concentrate

power in the hands of a single ruling family and to undermine the traditionally dispersed nature of power in the tribal system. The result was the establishment of absolute traditional monarchies in these Arab shaykhdoms. It should be noted that while Saudi Arabia did not experience British colonial influence, as did its counterparts on the Persian Gulf, the impact of the Saud-Wahhabi movement, as described previously, had a very similar effect in concentrating power in the hands of a single family. The advent of oil wealth subsequently served to consolidate the political positions of all these ruling families.

In the 19th century, Britain became increasingly involved in the Persian Gulf with the primary strategic goal of protecting her lines of communication with the Indian empire. A secondary interest in the region was trade. As threats to these two interests intensified throughout the century, Britain negotiated a series of bilateral treaties with local rulers with the primary mission of maintaining peace as well as protecting them from some outside aggressor. The treaties deliberately restricted British interference in internal affairs of the shaykhdoms, which resulted in a largely conservative impact on development and a dampening effect on social change. Some observers have suggested the negative impact of such a policy.

Certainly the consequence of Britain's imperial unconcern for internal affairs--coupled, rather oddly it may seem, with its insistence on excluding everyone

else--was that the Gulf states were ill-prepared for the almost simultaneous arrival of oil wealth and independence. [Ref. 19:p. 157]

On the coast, numerous nuclear settlements had been established in the past several centuries to take advantage of the pearling and maritime resources of the Persian Gulf. From these settlements began to emerge leading families who governed their respective communities with the traditional vigor and consensus required to maintain tribal support. The British penetration and establishment of protectorates along the Arab side of the Persian Gulf further enhanced the status of the Tribal Shaykhs as being "responsible for all members of their physical or tribal communities...." These protectorates legalized the concept of "shaykhdom" as well as formalized the British position vis-a-vis the Trucial Shaykhs. [Ref. 14:pp. 301-302]

The discovery of oil and rush by imperial powers, primarily Britain, to obtain concessions to oil reserves in the first several decades of this century served to further consolidate the position of ruling families in the various shaykhdoms. In a society with strong nomadic roots, there existed no concept of land property or territorial boundaries. When Western companies began to seek concessions in the Gulf littoral, they naturally approached whomever they felt could make an acceptable claim. In this case the ruling families of these British protectorates seemed the most legitimate authority with whom they could negotiate. "Granting of



concessions by the Rulers was done under the assumption by both parties that the Trucial Shakhs as a group held sovereignty...." [Ref. 14:p. 302]

Two important considerations emerged from this development. First, the need to delineate boundaries became apparent further enhancing the Rulers' status as state sovereigns. This also led to border disputes between neighboring Shaykhdoms, many of which remain today. Second, and more significant, the revenues that began to come into the country as oil production increased, went straight into the pockets of the Rulers. The distinction between the public coffers and personal wealth was grey indeed. This of course provided the Rulers with a means to increase their hold on power and consolidate their internal position. "This more or less personal payment...tends to strengthen their economic, and consequently their political position beyond all proportion." [Ref. 8:p. 298] The Rulers strengthened their internal position initially by subsidizing tribal notables (especially in Saudi Arabia) and then increasingly ensuring stability through formalized generosity, which of course leads to welfare states.

Ultimately what this concentration of authority into one family resulted in was the erosion of tribal society in the traditional sense. Only the ruling family continues to play an important political role in the Gulf shaykhdoms. Other tribal families have generally been able to retain influence

only by moving into other fields such as commerce or industry. Also contributing were other aspects of modernization such as urbanization and the exodus of many tribesmen from the interior to the nuclear settlements. [Ref. 14:p. 312] Moreover, the ruling family became increasingly exclusive and solitary in order to maintain control over an expanding bureaucracy. Greater exclusiveness has led to a "preeminence of kinship as an instrument of corporation and distribution of wealth, power, and benefits." Increased authority for the ruling family meant decreased influence for other tribal groups. [Ref. 12:pp. 440-442] Ultimately, what has emerged are absolute monarchies--perhaps the last true monarchies surviving--that are family-based, very exclusive and with whom kinship retains its preeminent role in both political and economic fields.

#### **E. THE TRADITIONAL MONARCHY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

For the traditional absolute monarch, the problems of modernization and the assimilation of newly emerging social groups and both new and old groups that have become politically conscious, is particularly difficult. As discussed above, modernization requires reform of the political system. In order to bring about this reform, power must be concentrated to overcome traditional forms of opposition to the modernization. As we have seen, historical factors of oil and colonialism have contributed significantly

to the concentration of power in the Arabian polities. The process of reform, however, releases forces which increasingly challenge this concentration of power and demand that the system be expanded to allow their participation. Samuel Huntington notes that the

...concentration of power was necessary to promote social, cultural, and economic reform while this centralization made it difficult or impossible to expand power of the traditional polity and assimilate into it new groups produced by modernization. [Ref. 7:p. 177]

For the absolute monarchies--of which Huntington describes Saudi Arabia as being the best model--there is an even greater impetus to reform in the 20th century when compared to less traditional developing regimes. This is due to the traditional basis of their claim to legitimacy, which in a modernizing world filled with ideas of democracy, liberalism and socialism is extremely vulnerable to challenges from various elements of society. The most important consideration for reform and modernization among traditional monarchies today has been the

...recognition of the need for modernization for domestic reasons. The principal threat to the stability of a traditional society comes not from invasion by foreign armies but from invasion by foreign ideas....The stability of twentieth century traditional monarchies is endangered from within rather than from without. [Ref. 7:p. 155]

The modernizing monarch must try to maintain the viability of his traditional legitimacy while changing his society. Traditional forces that feel threatened by the King's

modernizing policies will oppose him on the basis that he is moving too fast and undermining the fabric of the society, particularly given the influx of foreign ideas. Modern forces and newly emerging social groups, while approving of his modernizing tendencies, will claim he is not moving fast enough. Further, they will question the legitimacy of a traditional monarchy which continues to maintain its strict monopoly on political power. If the monarch does expand power to allow contending groups to participate in the system, the two diametrically opposed forces--traditionalists and modernists--will ultimately slow the developing efforts of the monarch. The result normally is the abolishment of participatory institutions by the monarch when he feels his power declining. Since the institutional nature of the monarchy is unable to expand power in the system, Huntington contends, the traditional polity is "able to transform the society," but it is "unable to transform itself." In the end, he warns, "the monarchical parent is eventually devoured by its modern progeny." [Ref. 7:p. 169]

The modernizing monarch will normally be forced to institute his reform measures by maintaining the centralization of power, and repressing opposition elements. "Both reform and repression are aspects of the centralization of power and the failure to expand political participation. Their logical result is revolt or revolution." [Ref. 7:pp. 190-191] While there are often forces in society that the monarch can draw

upon for support, such as the bureaucracy or masses, often, traditional monarchies rely heavily on foreign governments. Huntington demonstrates the peril involved in such a reliance.

Support from external sources, however, endangers the ability of the monarch to capitalize on what in the long-run may be the most potent sentiments among all groups in the society, the sentiments of nationalism [read anti-imperialism]...those monarchs perish who remain more committed to traditional values, class perspectives, and family interests than to national ones. [Ref. 7:p. 165]

For the ruling families of the Arabian peninsula this assertion has clear implications.

Huntington's final assessment of the ability of traditional monarchies to make a stable transition from traditional to modern society is bleak. Indeed, writing in the 1960s, he specifically uses six Middle Eastern monarchies as examples. Of those six today, four have experienced violent overthrows. [Ref. 7:p. 191]

The preceding has demonstrated the particular problems associated with the modernization of the traditional Arabian society. The concentration of power in the past century of these polities in the hands of single-ruling families has rendered them particularly vulnerable to the competing interests of new social groups and forces released by the process of modernization. If these families, still relying on traditional bonds of kinship and religion, continue to exclude these new groups from power, their situation will only get worse. The next chapter will examine efforts in the Gulf

regimes to expand political participation within their societies, the emergence of new groups and the impact of regional ideologies on these efforts and stability.

### III. THE ARAB GULF STATES

Social change has also become a major influence, and often the decisive factor, in the regional and international relations of the Middle East. The main threats to stability and peace in the area today stem from domestic and regional conflicts produced or exacerbated by the uprooting of the entire structure of society. The greatest danger, internationally, is not open aggression initiated from abroad but covert foreign intervention in internal political warfare initiated by Middle Easterners. [Ref. 15:p. 350]

The primary aim of the ruling families of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states is basically the same for each polity. This goal has been "to promote wide-ranging economic development while simultaneously attempting to preserve the traditional nature of society and, by implication, the traditional political structure." [Ref. 13:p. 3] The preceding chapter discussed the inherent problems associated with this objective and focused, in particular, on the ability for an absolute monarch to transition the society through modernization while maintaining a monopoly on political power. This chapter will examine specific efforts by the GCC states to establish political institutions which will expand political participation and assimilate various social groups into the society. It will also discuss some details on these groups and their current condition. As was alluded to in the previous chapter, if the ruling regimes in the Gulf continue to maintain their absolute hold on political

power, they will face an increasing, politically active, populous vulnerable to mobilization by ideologies that focus on symbols of tradition and anti-imperialism. This chapter will conclude on a discussion of these ideologies--specifically nationalism and Islamicism.

#### **A. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

In order to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the populations of these Gulf states, rulers must increasingly walk a tightrope between the traditionalists (often represented by religious forces) and the modernists. What results is "a fusion of traditional and new 'rationalist' elements." [Ref. 13:p. 7]

Gulf rulers have made an effort to link or translate the old concepts of tribal rule, based on decentralized power sharing and consultation, to more modern concepts of democracy and representative government. Majlis, or public session, as discussed earlier, was a tribal concept that allowed an individual in a tribe access to the ruler to address grievances. Shura is an Islamic practice that established the requirement for rulers to consult with community leaders on various decisions of importance. A combination of these two is claimed by many as the traditional tribal version of modern democracy. Thus, consultative bodies established by Gulf regimes are often bestowed the name majlis al-shura. However, this idealized notion of the past and present represents more of a



political mythology than reality. What minimal tribal egalitarianism existed in traditional society (nominal at best) prior to modernization, was completely wiped away by the impact of British colonialism, the Wahhabi-Saud movement and oil. Instead, the divisions between the rulers and the ruled increased. This "mythology" of tribal democracy is just that, mythology. [Ref. 13:pp. 15-16]

This attempt to fuse traditional and modern concepts of "democracy" has been made in most of the Gulf polities. Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) all have written constitutions in which sovereignty resides in the people. However, absolute power still remains in the hands of the ruler. In Saudi Arabia, King Fahd announced the establishment of a written constitution in March 1992 through three royal decrees that explicitly state all changes are based on the Koran and Sharia. Since 1932, Saudi Arabia has maintained that its constitution was the Sharia alone. This "new" constitution does incorporate the western concept of a bill of rights and establishes, for the first time in the Kingdom, a consultative national assembly. As with the other GCC nations, however, the ruling family essentially retains absolute power. [Ref. 26]

As alluded to above, Gulf regimes have experimented, to very limited degrees, with representative bodies or national assemblies, using the idea of establishing political institutions that will allow for greater participation. What has

emerged are institutions which appear more symbolic than substantive. The two regimes that have come closest to establishing an elected, representative assembly are Kuwait and Bahrain. Qatar, UAE and Oman all have consultative assemblies. The members to these assemblies are appointed by the ruler, no political parties are permitted, and while they are granted legislative review, they have no power to override a veto from the ruler. In a sense they are representative of the concept of shura by providing a forum for debate, but all the key decisions are made by the rulers. All three are currently functioning.

Saudi Arabia, although giving the concept of a national council lip service for many years, has only recently established such a body. Indeed, as early as 1962, Faisal as crown prince, called for a majlis shura and in the early 1980s, King Fahd gave the concept serious discussion indicating it was merely a matter of time. However, the decision was consistently procrastinated.

It was a case of recognizing in principle the need for some structural change as a "safety valve" in order to meet internal and external pressures, yet fearing that once the Pandora's box of change was even slightly opened it would be difficult to prevent wholesale political transformation of the state. [Ref. 5:p. 59]

Reacting to the agitation that accompanied the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, King Fahd finally pledged to create such a body in September of that same year. [Ref. 27:p. 11]

The royal decrees<sup>1</sup> establishing individual rights and the first semblance of a constitution beyond the Sharia, also announced the institution of a Consultative Council. As with the three regimes of the lower Gulf, this council is not an electoral body, and all 60 sixty members are appointed by the King. It will have the right to initiate legislation and review all foreign and domestic policies, as well as call in cabinet ministers for questioning. The King, however, retains the right to dissolve the Council at any time and appoint new members. [Ref. 26] While this move does expand public participation in government, it is only a slight advance in that direction. Further, just three weeks following the announcement, King Fahd, in a published interview, stated very explicitly that he ruled out free elections for his country based on Western democratic practices and reiterated the preeminent position of the Koran as the ultimate source of law and behavior in society. "The democratic system prevailing in the world does not suit us in the region...Islam is our social and political law...and is a complete constitution of social and economic laws and a system of government and justice." Some observers suggested that this statement was made in response to the religious Right's reservations about the royal decrees as well as a warning to the other Arab Gulf regimes not to carry their democratic experiments too far. [Ref. 28]

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<sup>1</sup>For the full text of royal decrees, see FBIS-NES, 2 March 1992, pp. 24-36.

Thus, while these regimes recognize the need to expand participation (to a limited extent on Western models) in order to meet the demands of an increasingly Western-oriented technocratic middle and upper class, they clearly understand the need to maintain traditional pillars of legitimacy. For the Saudi regime, this is particularly critical given the historic alliance with the Wahhabi religious movement and the ulama (religious scholars) in the country.

As mentioned, Kuwait and Bahrain are the only two regimes that have made sincere efforts to establish representative, elected assemblies that would allow for a real expansion of power to assimilate social groups into the political process. This is probably due to their longer exposure to oil-inspired socioeconomic change as well as the influence of, and reaction to, British colonialism. Both Shaykdoms have had an early history of political demands for greater participation by a generally urbanized population. The year 1938 witnessed extensive reform movements in both polities as well as Dubai in the lower gulf.

However, their experiments with representative political institutions have been generally short-lived, ending normally when there appears a real challenge to the power of the ruling regime. In Bahrain, for instance, a National Assembly was formed in 1973 following the Shaykdom's official independence from Britain. The 30 seats in the assembly were elected by about 29,000 voters and, although no parties were allowed,

"blocs" could be identified within the assembly. The popular bloc consisted of candidates who considered themselves leftists, nationalist and reformists. They held eight seats. The conservative bloc was made up of Shia candidates who had won six seats. The remaining 16 were generally independent and ideologically diverse. Although the assembly was not allowed to draft laws, it attempted to challenge the government on a security law that the amir had sought to enact in the wake of labor riots that had occurred in June and January of 1974. The diametrically opposed popular and conservative blocs came together and gathered both assembly and public support for their demands that the government submit the proposed law to the National Assembly for debate and approval. Sensing defeat, the amir dissolved the National Assembly in August 1975 and suspended the constitutional article requiring new elections. [Ref. 13:Chapter 3]

While there were allegations that the Saudis, as well as Iranians and Americans, had pressured the amir to dissolve the assembly,

...it was clear from the beginning that many in the Al Khalifa (ruling family of Bahrain) saw the National Assembly as a necessary appendage of a modern state but sought to describe it in terms of extension of shura, rather than popular participation in policy-making. [Ref. 13:p. 77]

When that "appendage" began to challenge the government, they dissolved it. Writing at the end of the 1980s, J.E.

Peterson, commented on the prospects for reinstitution of the assembly:

Although there has been steady popular sympathy for the reconstruction of the assembly, such support has not as yet intensified into a demand, and the government, bolstered by the opposition of a number of prominent members of the ruling family, has seen fit to leave the issue in abeyance indefinitely. [Ref. 13:p. 62]

Facing the same democratic pressures that the Saudis faced for political reforms in the wake of the Iraqi invasion, Bahrain has indicated intentions to restore her national council as well, and rumors have flourished recently that suggests the formation of such a body by the end of the year. [Ref. 13:p. 77] Whether this occurs remains to be seen.

Kuwait has a longer history of experimentation in electoral politics. In 1921 and 1938, consultative councils were formed in response to political disruptions to provide a safety valve for discontent. These initial attempts, however, lasted only a short time, generally until their activities began to impinge upon the actions of the ruling family. After Kuwait gained its independence in 1961, the Amir, Abdullah al-Salim, made the bold decision to institute a parliament. This first elected National Assembly consisted of 50 members elected by secret ballot. Laws could be promulgated after being passed by the assembly and sanctioned by the amir, and the assembly could override the ruler's veto by a two-thirds majority. Further, the assembly had a no-confidence

voting power over individual cabinet members but could not apply that to the prime minister or the cabinet as a whole.

In the first 14 years of its existence, the assembly was active and became an effective forum for criticism of government policy. From 1963 to 1967, the opposition bloc of liberal nationalists (generally emerging from the middle class) were able to keep some pressure on the government. However, the second assembly (1967-1971) saw a tremendous decrease in nationalist influence based on the Arab defeat (and Nasserism) in the 1967 war against Israel. This assembly was dominated by pro-government and conservative (Islamic) members. The early 1970s witnessed a reemergence of the nationalists and, by the 1975 elections, almost half the assembly consisted of less conservative, better educated members. Responding to increasing and active government opposition in both the assembly and Kuwait's fairly vigorous press, the amir dissolved the assembly and restricted the press in August 1976. At the same time, he suspended many constitutional articles, including that which required new elections within two months of dissolution. Although he promised to form a new National Assembly within four years, the amir's death in 1977 left the question open to debate within the Al Sabah ruling family on the future of the assembly. [Ref. 13:Chapter 2]

The National Assembly was restored in 1981 for several reasons. The amir was not adamantly opposed, there was much

popular support in the country and there was a need to enhance the legitimacy of the regime in the face of the Iranian Revolution. With the restoration came a restructuring of the electoral districts, which resulted in the election of an assembly that was heavily weighted toward pro-government bedouin. The sixth assembly, elected in 1985, proved more active and vigorous than the fifth assembly. One of the most successful groupings in the election was the Democratic Bloc whose members (leftists) ran on a platform of government inefficiency and the need for reform. The conservative Shia and Sunni Islamic groups did not do as well as expected mainly because of a failure to coordinate campaigns between the two religious sects.

The increasing criticism of government actions and accusations of financial impropriety of some of the Al Sabah family members led to the dissolution of the assembly by the amir in July 1986. Again, the amir restricted press activities and set aside constitutional requirements to hold new elections in two months. This second suspension had "an air of permanence about it, unlike the first one." Press restrictions were far more severe than in 1976 and the cabinet was reformed that had pro-government allies, including ex-assembly members. [Ref. 13:pp. 41-51]

Given Kuwait's longer tradition and history of institutions of political participation, it seems likely that, sooner or later, the National Assembly would have been restored with



or without a catalyst event. However, until 1990, the "ruling Sabah family showed not the slightest interest in resuscitating it." [Ref. 29:p. 47] It was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 that led to the latest election. Like King Fahd in Saudi Arabia, the Kuwaiti Amir pledged to restore the assembly following the liberation by allied forces.

The manner in which this most recent Kuwaiti experiment plays out may be an interesting indication of the future of political participation within the Arabian peninsula. Elections were held on October 5, 1992 to vote for the Seventh National Assembly, in which 278 candidates vied for 50 seats in parliament. Although only about 80,000 of the 600,000 Kuwaiti nationals (not to mention nearly one million non-nationals) were eligible to vote<sup>2</sup>, the result was a surprising mandate against government supporters. Indeed, 31 of the 50 seats went to candidates that included three separate and often ideologically diverse groups generally regarded as in opposition to government policies. These include the Islamists (both Shia and Sunni), the Democratic Forum (leftists and nationalists) and some other loosely aligned independents. [Ref. 30:p. 8]

Although generally loyal to the ruling family, these opposition groups (reflecting a mood throughout the country) are concerned mostly with government accountability,

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<sup>2</sup>Eligible voters included male Kuwaitis over 21 whose families have resided in the country since 1920.

especially regarding the public purse (which often is seen to be the private purse of the Al Sabah), as well as responsibility for the events which led to the invasion by Iraq in 1990. Specifically, the Islamic candidates have called for an amendment to the constitution so that sharia law becomes the sole source of legislation. Additionally, they have expressed deep reservations about Kuwait's very close political and military relationship with the United States. [Ref. 31] Many other candidates want the government to account for suspicious financial policies going back as far as 1982, as well as its free-spending policies since the liberation. [Ref. 29:p. 47] Additionally, the opposition has expressed a desire to separate the office of prime minister from that of the Crown Prince.

It is noteworthy that many of these issues, particularly the challenges to the government's financial improprieties, contributed heavily to the amir's decision to dissolve the National Assembly in 1986. How the government deals with this newly elected, and far more vocal and oppositionist body, will be an important signal of future Gulf political development. Perhaps as a note of warning, the amir, just a week after the elections, reappointed his heir, the Crown Prince, as Prime Minister in defiance of opposition calls for a separation of those two offices. This move was described by diplomats in Kuwait "as a slap in the face to the opposition." [Ref. 32]

The bottom line of this brief discussion on the development of participatory political institutions in the Arabian peninsula demonstrates that political power still remains firmly in the hands of the ruling families. The rulers have seemed to form these bodies in reaction to liberal elements in society or external pressure. Indeed, the establishment of the only electoral bodies in the Gulf, in Bahrain and Kuwait, may well have been a reaction to the strong Arab nationalist movements that predominated Arab politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Clearly, they intended these bodies to serve as safety valves rather than a substantive body to challenge government policy and participate in the decision making process. When these bodies became too aggressive, as in the case of Kuwait and Bahrain, the rulers moved to dissolve them. Similarly, the rulers follow the constitution only when it suits them and disregard it completely when they face challenges to their authority.

In the past decade, perhaps responding to the Right wing challenge from Islamic movements, there appears to be an increasing insularity within the ruling families, and a greater need to monopolize political power. Using external crisis to justify this, Kuwait's ruler was able to dissolve the National Council in 1986. Today in Kuwait, "nothing worries the pro-parliament lobby more than the thought that the Iraqi threat will be invoked to shelve reform." [Ref. 33:p. 15] Reflecting the political atmosphere in the Gulf, it

was a revealing comment that, following the dissolution of Kuwait's National Assembly in 1986, the common quip was that Kuwait had finally joined the GCC. [Ref. 13:p. 51] Indeed, following a meeting of GCC intellectuals in December 1991, a Bahraini theologian, Abd al-Latif Mahmoud, was arrested on his return home for a lecture he delivered that argued for domestic political reform throughout the GCC. In this lecture, he called for elected parliaments, freedom of expression, the rule of law and curbs on the powers and privileges of ruling families. Although he was later released on bail, this may be a harbinger of things to come. [Ref. 27:p. 11] Similarly, in May 1992, a group of 54 prominent Qatar citizens presented the amir with a petition demanding free parliamentary elections, a written constitution and the expansion of personal and political freedoms. The petition noted that

...such demands, while reflecting promises made in the past by the authorities themselves to hold free elections as long as two decades ago, constitutes a recognition of the right of citizens to run the affairs of their nation, and is in accordance with our Islamic faith, which directs us to adopt consultations and abide by them.

Within weeks after the petition was delivered, nearly all those involved came under some kind of government pressure from wire tap of phones, to confiscation of passports, to outright arrest. [Ref. 34]

It is safe to conclude that decision making in all the GCC states remains firmly in the hands of the ruling families and that this tiny elite as a group is virtually impenetrable.

"Such narrowness in the decision-making process leads to stagnation in outlook, particularly as it affects the development process, and, potentially, to alienation." [Ref. 13:p. 17] It is for this reason that the manner in which Kuwait deals with its newest attempt to expand power in the system and assimilate social groups into the decision making process is critical to the future stability of the Arabian peninsula.

#### **B. SOCIAL GROUPS IN GULF ARAB POLITIES**

Having discussed the character of political participation in the Gulf Arab states, it is now appropriate to examine some of the major groups that exist within these societies. These groupings are important because of their potential mobilization as a force of political destabilization in these vastly conservative polities. After discussing these groups, we will then examine the ideologies which provide the vehicles for political mobilization. Any discussion on Gulf Arab societies should begin with the nature of the rentier economy that exists in the GCC states because these economies impact considerably upon the makeup of society.

The gulf oil shaykhdoms are generally considered the premier examples of the "rentier state." The rentier state possesses an economy which relies primarily on its external rent or revenues that flow into the country from the export of a natural resource the nation may possess. For the GCC states, this resource is oil. It is an economy "where the

creation of wealth is centered around a small fraction of the society; the rest of the society is only engaged in the distribution and utilization of this wealth." [Ref. 35:p. 87] Further, the government is the principle recipient of that oil revenue and political leaders are the "preeminent economic decision makers...their values, far more than the market place, dictates economic policy." [Ref. 36:p. 19] These political leaders use their tremendous wealth in order to shore up their viability by distribution of that wealth throughout the society. Further, there is no requirement to tax citizens. The relative stability of these regimes to date (when compared to other Middle East regimes in the past four decades), many have suggested, was possible due to the ability of the rulers to "buy" political stability through the redistribution of oil revenues to citizens in the country.<sup>3</sup>

An additional political implication of the rentier states is to deepen the division between the ruling elite and the people. Since the economic wealth of these patrimonial states is concentrated in the hands of a few, their political power is enhanced. The rentier character tends to strengthen the exclusivity of the ruling elite, thus intensifying the political and economic gap between the rulers and the ruled.

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<sup>3</sup>See Giacomo Luciani's "Allocation vs Production States: A Theoretical Framework," and Hazen Beblawi's "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in Giacomo Luciani, Ed., The Arab State, University of California Press, 1990.

The industrialization that followed the advent of oil required the need to import expatriate skilled and unskilled labor. What developed was a vast difference between nationals and non-nationals in these societies. For the citizens of the country, there was a certain economic value in holding citizenship, thus creating a "welfare mentality" that expected these allocation states to provide various services. The expatriate labor increasingly came to dominate the "production" jobs that required real work. This encompassed everything from menial labor to skilled oil-related jobs. The expatriate labor, while doing the lion's share of the work, has received little of the benefit of the oil revenues and is politically alienated from the society. "The political cleavage between the two communities widens as the economic rent to citizens increases." Further, "though they serve the country, live--and also die--on its soil, they are not part of it." [Ref. 35:p. 95] The political implications of this situation will be discussed shortly.

An individual's awareness in a traditional society rises rapidly as that society develops and modernizes. This includes awareness of the amount of wealth that the oil is producing and the relationship of the ruling family to that wealth and to the society in general. "The Gulf states are no longer traditional tribal societies, and ruling families increasingly risk being perceived as an elitist class acting solely in their own interests." [Ref. 13:p. 11] The

challenge in the 1980s to Kuwait's Al-Sabah family regarding allegations that the public coffer was used to bail out family members following the 1982 Suq al-Manakh market crash is a case in point. [Ref. 35:p. 95] It was this grievance that led the amir to dissolve the parliament in 1986, a move which did little to refute the charges of the challenge.

Investment in the Western industrial economies by gulf rulers has been considerable. Saudi Arabian investments in the United States alone is estimated at \$70 billion. [Ref. 6:p. 418] These investments are seen by gulf economists as a means to provide an insurance policy for the future. The resultant ties and interdependence with Western economies and interests, particularly with reports of some suspicious and "dodgy" investments abroad [Ref. 29:p. 47] by family members, adds to this perception that ruling families are acting in their own personal interests. What is worse is the idea that their interests are so closely tied to (if not manipulated by) the West. Prior to the overthrow of their monarchies, Libya and Iraq provide examples of potential difficulties with this situation. In both "cases, the ruling family was seen as being subservient to foreign interests not just from a political point of view, but from a revenue point of view as well: they were forfeiting revenue. It is in this respect that corruption becomes important." [Ref. 35:p. 77]

The Arab rentier states of the Persian Gulf clearly have certain political advantages in the wealth that is so closely



tied to the ruling families. The ability to buy political support as well as the lack of the need to tax its citizens provides these states with a substantive instrument to ensure stability without expanding the social bases of political rule (power in the political system). However, increasing fluctuations in the world economy (i.e., oil glut in the mid-1980s), rising perceptions of ruling family corruption, as well as the interdependence with the Western economy, has resulted in an increasing demand for accountability and greater diversity between the nation's public coffers and the private finances of the ruling family members. Further, these economies have created two very different social groups in the societies, one of which has been restricted from any political role in the polity.

The expatriate population in the GCC states has assumed significant proportions of both the labor force and the overall population of the country. In some cases, nationals are finding themselves increasingly in the minority. In Kuwait, non-nationals represent 80 percent of the labor force prior to the Iraqi invasion. [Ref. 37:p. 51] Similarly, the percentage of expatriate workers in the labor force in Saudi Arabia is 75 percent, in UAE is 90 percent and in Bahrain is 56 percent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See U.S. Department of State, Background Notes, for respective countries.

The welfare nature of these rentier states provides too many opportunities for nationals to seek bureaucratic and government employment which in many ways is often used as an unemployment benefit. [Ref. 38:p. 671] There is little economic incentive that attracts nationals to skilled training, thus increasing the dependence on foreign labor. The massive influx of foreign labor into the GCC countries in the past two decades has been met with efforts to ensure complete separation of this foreign population with the national population. While migrants are integrated economically, they are alienated both socially and politically. "Separation, not integration or assimilation is the goal." [Ref. 39:p. 163]

GCC governments keep firm control over the expatriate populations by issuing temporary visas, restricting families from accompanying the workers and making citizenship requirements next to impossible to meet. Additionally, the relationship between the expatriate force and the state has been financially beneficial and thus the non-nationals have been to date relatively docile politically. However, the large influx has created a momentum which cannot be ignored. [Ref. 19:p. 194] Despite efforts to limit the expatriate populations, there are increasing numbers of non-national Asian and Arab workers who have resided in GCC countries all their lives

if not for several generations. Along with this has been a natural increase in non-national populations through births.<sup>5</sup>

Many observers of GCC countries are beginning to acknowledge the potential problems associated with these non-national populations. Glen Balfour-Paul notes that this has been recognized as

...a problem of nightmare quality....In brute terms the alternatives are either to retain national discrimination and view the immigrants as a temporary embarrassment or to liberalize substantially the nationalization laws--the former risking economic collapse, the latter a non-national takeover. [Ref. 19:p. 161

Sharon Stanton Russell sums up the problem well in her essay on political integration of migrant workers into the Gulf states:

The future status of migrants in the politics of the Gulf must be determined in the context of rethinking how long-range political stability and economic prosperity are best achieved. The underlying assumptions on the bases of which Gulf states chose to ensure domestic political stability and regime support by differentiating sharply between citizens and non-citizens have changed. In many places citizens are not the majority they were when basic nationality laws were passed....Both past naturalizations and rising levels of education and technical skill have introduced new subgroups, expectations and complexities among the citizenry itself. The increased sensitivity of the population to basic Islamic principles has only deepened the moral dilemmas inherent in differential treatment of Muslim Arab naturalized citizens and non-citizens alike. Nor are migrants merely the temporary sojourners they were once expected to be. They are long-term residents...they are, increasingly, native-born sons and daughters whose commitment to their

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<sup>5</sup>See George Sabagh's essay, "Immigrants in the Arab Countries: Sojourners or Settlers?", in Luciani and Salame, Eds., The Politics of Arab Integration.

country of birth remains an unchanneled resource for stability. Together, these factors pose new challenges to the internal coherence of Gulf societies, argue for a careful reassessment of the role of migrants in their host countries and will make migration a continuing factor in political integration for years to come. [Ref. 39:p. 208]

In view of the continuing restrictions on political participation among national citizens, it seems likely that the political alienation of non-nationals will remain a fact of Gulf life for the foreseeable future. A failure to address this by the regimes can only result in difficulty.

As alluded to above, the welfare nature of these states, opportunities for government jobs and overwhelming dependence on foreign labor has created problems of work ethics among many nationals. In fact many have suggested an outright aversion to productive labor has become ingrained in the work ethics of many young Arab nationals in these Gulf nations.

Despite this, however, several national socioeconomic and sectarian groups have emerged as potential challengers to the current status quo. Probably the most powerful is what appears to be an emerging middle class throughout the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia, reflecting the rest of the Gulf, this new class consists of technocrats, professionals, entrepreneurs, merchants and military officers. [Ref. 40:p. 163] Often educated in American, European and Egyptian universities, this group is beginning to "consider themselves better qualified... than members of the royal family...." to make decisions

of national importance. "They chafe under the prevailing system." [Ref. 6:p. 74]

Modernists, nationalists or liberal, they represent a broad range of interests and desires. In the context of Gulf politics, of course, they are "Left" of center. They

...support the right of labor to unionize; the right of women to education, freedom of choice and employment; the institution of self-governing bodies and public representation; the standardization of law; the elimination of state allowances to members of the ruling families; the assimilation of Arab foreign labor; and merger between the Gulf states as a prelude to Arab unity. [Ref. 12:p. 445]

Despite their considerable personal achievements, they are still excluded from the decision making process by the traditional ruling families. The kinds of reforms that they are calling for impinge directly upon the monopoly of political and economic power that the rulers currently hold and, as we have seen above, the rulers have only given in when faced with considerable internal and external pressures. Undoubtedly, these pressures will continue to increase given the expansion of the ranks of the emerging middle class, increasing frustration and urbanized masses that are becoming more educated and sophisticated. [Ref. 40:p. 166]

If this secular-minded, liberal and Western-educated emerging middle class is pushing for more democratic reform from the Left, the Right has risen as a counterforce to these efforts in the form of Islamists. As has been apparent throughout this paper, Islam has always played a preeminent

role in Gulf politics and the regimes have maintained some of their legitimacy by ensuring that Islamic principles, such as Sharia law, assume a prominent position in their conduct of government. This has become particularly necessary with the rise of Islamic fundamentalist movements in the past decade and Gulf regimes have found it necessary to assume a more conservative religious posture. Of course, in Saudi Arabia, given the historic Wahhabi-Saudi alliance and its self-proclaimed role as protector of the Holy mosques, a very conservative religious form of government has been a fact of political life since the establishment of the Kingdom earlier in this century.

It is thus particularly worrisome to the ruling families of these traditionally conservative regimes when they come under attack from a religious Right which is challenging the very essence of their legitimacy. These religious scholars and intellectuals reject, in particular, the Western ideas which appear to define the direction in which modernization should move. They want a return to the basic principles of Islam as the defining construct of political, social and economic behavior and chafe at the close military and economic relationship that these countries, Saudi Arabia in particular, have developed with the United States. In fact, they intensely distrust Western intentions in the region and tie them closely with Zionist aspirations. During the Gulf crisis and the deployment of half-a-million foreign troops to the

Arabian peninsula, Saudi theologians questioned the prudence of such a move, feeling that the crisis was being used by the West as "a pretext to occupy the Muslim heartland." An imam in Riyadh asked during the crisis, "If a dog has come onto your land, would you invite a lion to get rid of it?" [Ref. 41:pp. 9-10] Another opinion notes the deployment of "infidel troops on Arabian soil had exposed the Saudi monarchy to the delegitimizing charge that it was consorting with the infidels and, by extension, with their natural allies, the Zionists." [Ref. 41:p. 11]

In Saudi Arabia, two petitions have been issued in the last two years by fundamentalist clergymen criticizing all aspects of the Kingdom's foreign and domestic policy. The most recent was presented in July 1992 and represents their basic philosophy as well as increasingly bold criticism of the Saudi regime. [Ref. 42] In foreign policy, the clergymen demanded that the military pacts signed with the United States be canceled; they urged arms purchases from a "variety of countries, not from one particular country"; and they rejected a "reliance on any foreign power, even in defense of" Saudi Arabia. [Ref. 43] Domestically, they insisted that the Sharia should be the sole base of Saudi laws. "To resort to French penal law or civil Egyptian law is totally unacceptable." Further, they attacked the government on human rights violations and economic policies that borrowed "from over 30 international banks at interest which led to debts of tens of

billions of dollars, especially during the gulf war." Additionally, they called for the expansion of the army to 500,000 men and criticized the government controlled press that had lost the public's trust, leading "people to resort to the aggressive media of the unbelieving countries in an effort to obtain facts and truth." [Ref. 43]

While the fundamentalist clearly do not represent a vast majority, there is a powerful message in their attack on the Saudi regime which challenges the legitimacy of modernization on Western lines, and indeed the very basis of the Saudi regime. This attack is far more pervasive and dangerous than those of secular Arab nationalists such as Nasser and the Bathists in the 1950s and 1960s. They cannot ignore this challenge and thus are posed with the classic dilemma of placating both the Left and Right without undermining their own position. Like the liberals, the fundamentalists are calling for greater say within the government, although based on the Islamic principle of consultation rather than western-style democracy. [Ref. 44:p. 42] The result most often is an increasingly close hold on political power. Despite attempts at national councils, this appears to be occurring today as has been demonstrated above. The longer that these forces in society, liberal or conservative, are kept out of the decision-making process, the more likely they are to resort to extreme means. Regional ideologies can become very important as a mobilizing force for political action, particularly when



they are able to apply powerful symbols of discontent. As we will see in the last section of this chapter, the most powerful symbol that has been used in the Middle East in the 20th century has been anti-imperialism.

### **C. IDEOLOGIES**

The populist appeal of Arab nationalism and Islamicism were discussed in the previous chapter. It is, however, important to further emphasize and illustrate a common symbolic thread which runs through both ideologies, though diametrically opposed, that has made them so successful as tools of political mobilization. That common thread is anti-imperialism.

The half-century which preceded the fall of the Ottoman empire witnessed considerable political and economic changes in the Middle East. The attempts by the Sultans of the Ottoman Porte to modernize the fledgling empire led to the spread of many Western ideas in the urban centers of Damascus, Beirut, Jerusalem and Baghdad. Along with this spread of ideas was the military, political and economic penetration by European powers into the region throughout the 19th century. Algeria was invaded by France in 1830, Egypt came under British occupation in 1882 and Libya was colonized by Italy in 1911. Consequent with these developments, political thought of Islamic thinkers expanded and evolved in attempts to understand the problems of transitioning Middle Eastern society to

a modern world dominated by the West, and to formulate new theories in attempts to reinvigorate the "sickman of Europe."

The focus of their concern for the deterioration of the empire centered on the survival of the Islamic community. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Mohammad Abduh presented the maturation of these efforts to reform the empire in order to ensure the survival of Islam from foreign corruption. At the same time there emerged an increasing sense of the Arab nation which was tied, for historic reasons, explicitly to Islam. "To return to the original purity of Islam meant in fact to move the centre of gravity back from Turks to Arabs." [Ref. 16:p. 268] This rising belief merged with the demise of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. The aspirations of Arab nationalism which emerged in force after the war were used, as discussed earlier, by contending political elements in society to maintain or gain power. The suppression of these aspirations by the mandatory powers after the war crushed the immediate realization of Pan-Arab unity. In its place, a more particularist version of nationalism emerged based largely on the political division of the Arab lands by the mandatory powers. For the Arab nationalists of this interwar period, their ideas were increasingly influenced by secular, Western concepts of political development although they constantly sought independence from the West.

Islam, as a result, took an ideological back seat to the nationalist system. The center of gravity was shifted from

Islam as divine law to Islam as a culture. "Instead of Arab nationalism being regarded as an indispensable step towards the revival of Islam, Islam was regarded as the creator of the Arab nation, the content of its culture or the object of its collective pride." [Ref. 16:p. 308] However, its influence remained and always posed an intellectual dilemma.

Islam was what the Arabs had done in history, and in a sense it had created them, given them unity, law, a culture. For both Muslim and Christian Arabs, in different ways, there lay a dilemma at the bottom of Arab nationalism: secularism was necessary as a system of government, but how was complete secularism compatible with the existence of an Arab sentiment?" [Ref. 16:p. 297]

Indeed, that question continues to haunt Arab leaders and intellectuals today.

Throughout the interwar period, nationalist agitation expanded and continued both against colonial occupiers and their perceived proxies or puppets that ruled the monarchies in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Jordan. The continued Jewish immigration in Palestine added fuel to this explosive mixture and the last half of the 1930s witnessed uprising and political agitation from the Persian Gulf states to Jerusalem. World War II and the weight of modernization ushered in a new era in Arab politics. In the wake of the 1948 Palestine war, a new middle class represented by Nasserism in Egypt and the Ba'th Party in Syria rose up to seize power.

The case they had made against the ancien regime was the standard case made by broadly-based middle-class nationalists against older, more narrowly based political regimes: that they were embarrassingly weak

and compromised, prone to collaboration, disconnected from aspiring social classes, and easily torn to shreds by outsiders. [Ref. 24:p. 15]

The period that followed lasted until 1967. "This was the era of Suez, of the fight for Algeria, of the collapse of the Iraqi Hashemite monarchy in 1958, of the great crusade of nonalignment, and of the fight against the West." These new regimes

...had the capacity to mobilize; they could promise socioeconomic justice, political participation, and the capacity to take on the outside world without defeat or collaboration. Like other such nationalists elsewhere, this generation's symbols had thrown young men and women into a whirlwind of excitement and frenzy. [Ref. 24:p. 15]

By the end of the 1950s, the Arab state-system had polarized into two camps--radical and conservative. The so-called Arab Cold War that followed saw the conservative regimes of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf principalities and Jordan constantly on the defensive against aggressive political and, at times, military attacks on their legitimacy from the radical camp of Nasser's Egypt, and Ba'thist Syria. The devastating defeat to Arab armies in 1967 undermined the radical leftist ideology which concentrated more on symbols and anti-imperialism and less on the real issues of addressing socioeconomic and political grievances that were racking Arab societies.

The fall of Arab nationalism ideology gave respite, if temporary, to the conservative regimes and seemed to validate their stand against "wild men, imported ideologies, and subversive movements." [Ref. 24:p. 73] The 1970s and the oil

boom that characterized that decade saw the reemergence of the conservative Gulf regimes as leaders in the Arab world. However, the same forces which had been mobilized by Arab nationalism in the 1950s still remained latent. "Now a younger generation--for whom liberalism had become anathema, another word for Western colonialism--would seek a different inspiration." [Ref. 24:p. 48] Indeed, the nationalist impulses that had been

...unleashed by the Egyptian Revolution...were not arrested by the diplomatic and military containment of Egypt in 1967. The challenge posed by Iran's Islamic revolutionary ideology is different only in form from that presented earlier by Egypt's revolutionary pan-Arabism. [Ref. 25:p. 510]

This new ideology mobilized and excited the same forces in society that were trying to come to grips with social disruptions and the insecurity associated with modernization.

The time bomb of pan-nationalism, now couched in Islamic rather than secular terms, was likely to explode in the face of the Middle Eastern elites.... The perceived capitulation of the conservative elites to foreign pressure, and especially to Israeli advances, served to sharpen the focus of this radical pan-Islamic orientation. [Ref. 25:p. 520]

As with pan-nationalism in the 1950s, "the resurgence of Islam is a response to the blockage of ideas and the failure of state elites." [Ref. 24:p. 212] This belief played an important mobilizing role in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Under the populist appeal of Islamic resurgence, ideologically diverse social and political groups in Iranian society formed a coalition that opposed the shah. Much of the focus of that

opposition centered upon the relationship with the United States. [Ref. 45:p. 214] The three broad factions that made up the opposition movement included left-oriented Marxists, middle-class liberal secularists and religious fundamentalist clergy. In the end, Ayatollah Khomeini's clergy was able to consolidate the revolution because of its mass appeal to Islamic and anti-imperial symbols as well as the institutional (mosque-based) infrastructure that the clerical establishment enjoyed. [Ref. 46:p. 168] The other factions had been forced to join with the clergy in hopes that they would be able to use this appeal to overthrow the shah but then gain control of the revolution and the country. Khomeini and his clerics proved too strong and were able to destroy the other factions within several years.

As Nasser had done in the 1950s, the Islamic Revolution used as its most potent symbol for mobilization an intense anti-imperialist sentiment. Indeed, this version would prove far more energetic than anything Nasser had been able to muster. Furthermore, it would present to the conservative monarchies of the Gulf, a "more dangerous adversary; it easily pointed out the transgressions of those who had professed their adherence to Islam." This political Islam "provides the arena in which political, and largely oppositional, sentiments can be expressed." [Ref. 41:p. 18] Emerging from the culture itself, from the very essence of the Arab nation, fundamentalism could not be combated with the usual exhortations that it

was an imported ideology from the West. While it probably lacks the coherence to govern, "it can topple the world of the elites, shatter their illusions, demonstrate that they have surrendered to the ways of the aliens." [Ref. 24:p. 209] Consequently, the 1980s witnessed the conservative regimes increasingly professing their adherence to Islam, and tried desperately to appear as distant from the West as possible, in attempts not to be out-Islamicized by the fundamentalist movements that gained strength throughout the region.

In the most recent Gulf crisis, even the avowed secularist, Saddam Hussein, was able to attack the conservative regimes using this theme. "Saddam was able to argue that, like Palestine, the land containing the holy cities of Mecca and Medina had itself fallen prey to occupation. He spoke of the need to liberate Mecca, 'hostage of the Americans,' from troops of the Western-led coalition." This call was met with positive response throughout the Muslim world as far away as China. [Ref. 41:pp. 6-7] The Gulf crisis "highlighted the important mobilizing role that Islamic symbolism and sentiment play in the politics of Muslims." [Ref. 41:p. 24]

Indeed, in the wake of the Gulf war, the Middle East has seen the emergence and increasing strength of Islamic movements throughout the region. In Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank, the Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula, these movements have been manipulating the same discontent that Arab nationalism was able to manipulate in the

1950s and 1960s. By pronouncing the true answer to the problems of a transitioning world--an answer founded in Arab culture, rather than Western culture--these movements can utilize the powerful symbols of anti-imperialism to challenge their regimes in power. In the wake of the Gulf war, with the apparent hegemony of the United States in the region, this has become a particularly useful tool to mobilize opposition.

It is not the intent of this chapter to announce the impending fall of the Gulf shaykdoms in the near future. Indeed, they have demonstrated considerable stability in the past several decades especially when compared to their fellow Middle-Eastern monarchies. This is probably due, in large part, to the wealth associated with the oil boom and the ruling families' nearly exclusive control over that wealth which can be used to placate potentially discontented segments of society.

Having noted this, however, this situation cannot last forever, and it would be folly to assume that the Gulf states of the 1990s will be the same as the Gulf states of the 1970s and 1980s. Great changes have occurred both globally and regionally which have accelerated the process of development in this region and local events of the 1980s and early 1990s, have illustrated for many in the region their role in the world as well as in their own society. Expectations will only rise from all segments of these societies as advances in



communication, education and technology further expand the horizons of Gulf peoples.

The first part of this chapter demonstrated that the ruling families of the Gulf have made little substantive progress toward expanding their political participatory institutions. It may even be suggested that these regimes have become increasingly isolated from their societies and increasingly impenetrable. The system they have employed thus far will not work into the next century if they do not move to assimilate new social groups into the political decision-making process. Even observers that have argued for the stability of these regimes acknowledge that this is the case. J.E. Peterson notes in his work on political participation in the Persian Gulf that, "there is a tendency of ruling families in the Gulf to dismiss the importance of political participation in national councils, preferring instead to rely on traditional methods, but this attitude is quickly becoming both outdated and dangerous." [Ref. 13:p. 121] Glen Balfour-Paul echoes this sentiment in his essay, "Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE: Political and Social Revolution." [Ref. 19:p. 168]

If these regimes continue to exclude other groups in their society from the decision-making process, these groups will become increasingly vulnerable to mobilization by oppositional ideologies, be they liberal or conservative. Currently, the more dangerous challenge appears to come from the religious Right. Its message rises from the very culture and plays upon

the powerful symbols of anti-imperialism to help explain the social disruptions and difficulties that these transitioning societies are experiencing. It empowers the people and strikes at the very heart of these conservative Gulf regimes. The longer the ruling families hold on to their monopoly, the greater the prospect of political disruptions and instability.

In an essay on current sources of instability in the region, Shibley Telhami sums up the problem and the difficulties it poses for American interests in the Persian Gulf.

To sustain themselves, Arab allies of the United States might become more repressive and, as a result, Islamic activism will rise. Since repression entails the absence of the legal means to organize political opposition, lacking alternative vehicles for mass political organization, the populace will turn to available social structures; in the case of the Middle East, it is the mosques. The absence of legitimacy through representative government, and the turn to religious and cultural vehicles for mass political mobilization, will fuel transnationalism in the region even more. The potential consequences of these events are not favorable in regard to US interests." [Ref. 47:pp. 4-5]

#### IV. SINCE THE GULF WAR

The memory that weighs heavily on the minds of the great generality of Muslims is of imperialist rule, Western antagonism toward Arab nationalism, the creation and fortifying of the state of Israel, and American hostility toward the Islamic revolution in Iran. [Ref. 41:p. 14]

...the road to Baghdad lay open before the American-led coalition. A quarter-century earlier, in the summer of 1967, the road to Cairo lay open before the Israelis as well. The book ends of a quarter-century: history repeats here, a cruel mixture of delusion and betrayed promises. [Ref. 24:p. 14]

As has been discussed in previous chapters, the experience that the peoples of the Middle East have had with the Western powers historically has been difficult to say the least. The impact of the West, through the colonial and mandatory period, as well as the exploitation of oil, has been socially, politically and economically dramatic and disruptive. Throughout the 20th century, the people of this region have tried to deal with this process of development and modernization that had thrown their traditional society into shambles. Most often, they were excited and mobilized politically by symbols with which they could identify. Whether nationalistic or Islamic, these symbols were and are used by social groups contending for political power in society. For the Middle East experience, anti-Westernism of some form or the other emerged as the most useful and applicable to the ideologies of both

conservatives and liberals alike. It matters little if one can argue that Western intentions and interests in the region are benevolent. The overriding feeling and experience of "the great generality" of Arabs is to the contrary. Perceptions are important. Indeed, they are reality.

Perhaps the first thing to keep in mind when considering American actions both during the Gulf War and in its aftermath is this extremely potent perception of American military power being used to ensure the personal survival and continuance in power of the ruling families of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent those of the rest of the GCC. This image becomes all the more nefarious given the popular conception of American double standards when applied to Israel and traditional support for Gulf monarchies despite the lack of democratic movement in those societies. Set against the backdrop of over ten years of ceaseless anti-American rhetoric emanating from Tehran that applied Islamic images and symbols, such a perception and its impact upon the stability of pro-American regimes should not be underestimated.

Saddam Hussein was able to draw upon this perception with some success among the masses. Mary Norris, in a RAND report on the regional dynamics of the crisis, explains that:

Although there has been unprecedented support for U.S. actions on the part of international and regional governments, there has also been a groundswell of support for Saddam by the populations of Arab countries. This support does not come from personal admiration of Saddam or his actions; most Arabs see him as a bully and an opportunist who has seized the

issues of the day and wrapped himself in the flag of Arab nationalism...they believe that he intends to use this army to avenge Arab political and economic exploitation at the hands of the West. They support his stand against the West because Saddam has managed to tap into an enormous reservoir of resentment that is the product of centuries of Arab humiliation, first at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and then at the hands of the West. Arab sentiment is with Kuwait against Iraq--but with Iraq against the United States and the West. [Ref. 48:pp. 6-7]

She continues by noting that, "The real question is not why Saddam is popular among Arabs; rather, it is the significance of his popularity in both the current context of the war and in its aftermath that requires attention." [Ref. 48:p. 7] The preceding chapters have attempted to shed some light on that significance. The problem is that American policy in the region since the Gulf War has seemed entirely to ignore this underlying issue and, instead, enthralled with the military success of Desert Storm, has expanded to an unprecedented level the military component of U.S. strategy toward the Persian Gulf region.

#### **A. DEFENSE TREATIES**

The defense arrangements that several of the Gulf states have signed with the United States and other Western powers is virtually unprecedented since the British pulled out of the Gulf 20 years ago. Further, before the Gulf crisis, the concept of such negotiations would never have been considered seriously in a public forum. Today,

Two years after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the United States has deepened its commitment to defending the

oil-rich Arab states on the Persian Gulf through bilateral security agreements and is maintaining its largest--and most visible--peacetime military presence in the gulf." [Ref. 49]

Thus far, the United States has negotiated defense pacts with Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. These 10-year pacts provide for U.S. access to port and basing facilities, pre-positioning of equipment in some cases and the establishment of security assistance training as well as joint bilateral exercises between host country and American military forces. That many of the details of the accords remain classified matters little to the overall perception. It is, instead, the well-publicized fact of the treaties that impacts upon the Arab view of the Western-GCC relationship. After unveiling the agreement in Kuwait in September 1991, the Kuwaiti foreign minister noted that the pact "implicitly" committed the United States to Kuwait's defense. [Ref. 50:p. 13] Whether this is true or not, such statements do little to refute the perception.

Bahrain has been somewhat more hesitant about publicizing its relationship. Similarly, Saudi Arabia has "expressed a reluctance to develop formal military ties with Washington, particularly if these were to lead to visible U.S. military presence in the kingdom." [Ref. 49] Notwithstanding the well-known presence of American combat aircraft flying from airfields in Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Southern Watch (no-fly regime in southern Iraq) [Ref. 51:p. 29], the

rulers are increasingly re-understanding the quandary of a close and well-known security relationship with the United States. "Such an arrangement leaves Saudi policy makers under possible charges from both within and outside the country of 'selling out' and being too closely aligned with an 'imperial' power." [Ref. 52:p. 110]

These charges carry more weight when juxtaposed with the rejection by the GCC states of the Damascus Declaration, which amounted to an "Arab solution" to the Gulf security problem. This declaration was announced in March 1991 by the six GCC states and Egypt and Syria. Also known as "6+2," the arrangement envisioned a formal Arab alliance which would provide for the presence of significant Syrian and Egyptian military forces in the Arabian peninsula to form a protective shield for future Iraqi or possibly Iranian ventures into the area. In return for Syrian and Egyptian protection, the GCC would provide "suitable financial recompense." [Ref. 53:p. 16] As early as April 1991, the GCC had quietly informed Cairo and Damascus that they were not interested in a permanent presence of non-Gulf Arab forces in the region and Egyptian and Syrian troops were redeployed soon after. Instead, they have turned to the United States and the West for security guarantees.

Whether the Damascus Declaration failed from Iranian pressures [Ref. 50:p. 13], or due to a simple distrust of Syrian and Egyptian designs, is not important. What is important is the image of the GCC turning away from the rest of the

Arab world and turning toward the West. [Ref. 27:p. 11] This increases the already unfavorable view that non-Gulf Arabs have of the Shaykhdoms and increases the specter of the division between the haves and the have-nots.

Finally, within the GCC itself, while there appears to be consensus that some kind of integration of military forces is required, there has been no agreement on substance. Despite great expectations, the annual GCC summit held in December 1991 in Kuwait produced little more than talk on security issues. Oman's proposal to form a 100,000 man joint army for the GCC states represented the only substantive issue brought to the floor. It was shelved with gratitude to Sultan Qaboos for his efforts. [Ref. 27:p. 11] Despite increasing calls from both Islamic and liberal Gulf intellectuals for greater integration of the GCC states, there seems instead to be more disintegration given the rising rate of intra-GCC border disputes. Ruling family rivalries appear to be the major impediment and a fear that any kind of "merger will weaken the position of the present ruling family." [Ref. 12:p. 446] This, of course, further fuels the image of the GCC ruling families acting explicitly in their own interests rather than in the interests of their individual countries, the GCC as a whole or, indeed, the "Arab nation."



## **B. EXPANDED MILITARY PRESENCE**

Like the establishment of the bilateral defense pacts with the individual GCC states, the expanded United States military presence in the region is also unprecedented in peacetime. This applies not so much to the size of the forces in the Gulf, but more to the activity and visibility of their presence. Today it is not unusual to open the newspaper and see a picture of U.S. marines landing on a beach near Kuwait City or an American nuclear submarine entering the port in Manama, Bahrain. Three years ago, such sights were unheard of. Even during the 1987-1988 Tanker War (American naval forces escorted Kuwaiti tankers through the Persian Gulf), U.S. warships were prohibited from entering Kuwaiti waters and long leadtimes were required for units to enter most of the Gulf countries. In contrast today, "We've got ships going into ports left and right. We've got ships and airplanes doing bilateral exercises left and right," noted a senior American naval officer in a recent interview. [Ref. 49] Rather than "over-the-horizon," as had been the case prior to the Gulf crisis, American military power has clearly moved to a position "on-the-horizon." [Ref. 49]

As noted above, bilateral exercises have increased as well. In fact, since the Gulf War, major exercises have multiplied five-fold. [Ref. 54] Additionally, and probably more problematic, the United States has on numerous occasions in the past year rattled the saber to force Iraq to comply

with UN sanctions imposed following the Gulf War. While there were very good reasons for this, it must be understood that this further adds to the perception of an imperial giant in the Gulf wielding its power.

Perhaps the most active and visible demonstration of American military prowess in the region besides the Gulf War itself is Operation Southern Watch. This operation has been underway for nearly four months and entails the establishment of a no-fly zone for Iraqi aircraft in roughly the southern third of Iraq. It was established in order to provide a military umbrella over Iraqi Shi'a who had come under attack by the Iraqi air force, similar in some ways to the Kurdish zone established in the north.

Although not a safe-haven by the definition of the Kurdish zone, the decision to take action to protect the Shi'a represented an obvious turnabout in American policy. Immediately following the Gulf War, Iraqi Shi'a in the south had rebelled against the Baghdad government only to be crushed by Hussein's forces while American troops still occupied parts of Iraq. Justifying U.S. restraint, the Bush Administration reasoned that it wanted to avoid a military quagmire. [Ref. 55] As evidence began to mount in the summer of 1992 concerning a renewed effort by Hussein to purge the so-called "Marsh Arabs" from their homelands, and stung by charges that he had failed in ousting Saddam Hussein, President Bush decided, along with Britain and France, to put the air umbrella into operation.

It would be disingenuous to pretend that the American-led allies are being impelled back to the Gulf by a romantic concern for a tribe of fishermen, or by a sudden discovery of repression. What they want, George Bush most of all, is Mr. Hussein's head. [Ref. 56:p. 13]

Significantly, the allied coalition that is conducting this operation has been considerably reduced from its wartime membership. Globally, only the U.S., Britain and France are involved and indeed have been the driving force for the establishment of the no-fly zone. Moreover, neither the Kurdish safe-haven in the north nor the no-fly zone in the south have been legalized by the United Nations. [Ref. 51:p. 29] On the regional level, the move has been opposed by both Syria and Egypt, and within the GCC itself by the UAE and Oman. [Ref. 57] Only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have supported the move. Even this support has been qualified by Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has announced that Saudi fighters will not fly over Iraq [Ref. 58], and, on a publicity level, has refused visas to journalists wanting to report on allied air forces flying from the air base at Dhahran. [Ref. 59]

Clearly, there has been a real reduction in both international and regional support for continued action of this sort. More and more, the image of the three old imperialist nations--Britain, France and the United States--acting unilaterally in pursuit of their own perceived interests (along with suggestions of American electoral politics) begins to emerge. In another regional conflict that pits these

Western powers against an Arab leader, Muammar Qaddafi, this perception is reinforced. The UN Security Council's condemnation of Libyan refusal to turn over suspected terrorists was viewed in the Arab world with deep suspicion. As The Economist noted last April,

Politics has rules of its own. One of them is that when westerners gang up on an Arab country, other Arabs are liable to spring--if only rhetorically--to its defence. Most Arab governments were happy enough about the squashing of Saddam Hussein....But, as Lady Bracknell might have said, the Gulf war was a misfortune. Another UN-led action against an Arab, little more than a year later, begins to look like carelessness--or a deliberate policy of Arab-bashing. [Ref. 60:p. 18]

Operation Southern Watch has forced many Muslims to make comparisons between the plight of Iraqi Shi'is and the Bosnian Muslims. Why, many Arabs ask, is the U.S. using warplanes in southern Iraq to protect persecuted Shi'is while continuing to oppose action in the Balkans to stop Serbian aggression against Bosnian Muslims? This appearance of a "double standard" has been pointed out by most Arab nations including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. [Ref. 61]

The view of American intentions in Iraq is considered suspect throughout most of the Arab world. The Kurdish safe-haven in the north and the no-fly zone in the south have raised the specter of the dismemberment of the Iraqi state by Western powers. For many Arabs, this kind of perception brings back memories of the post-World War I period when Britain and France divided the newly-freed Arab world into

spheres of influence. One Arab editorial, commenting on this issue, remarked that the Western policy could "mask other objectives which arouse suspicion and concern, and which involve plans for new maps and statelets." It concluded that,

...while we await the appearance of someone who can clarify what is being planned for the region and its peoples, all talk of human beings and their rights, states and their sovereignty, and the use of resources for development would appear to be wishful thinking. It is the same hand that drew the maps of the states that emerged after the two world wars which is now redrafting them to ensure the security and existence of several new Israels in the Middle East. [Ref. 62:pp. 21-22]

A daily paper in Jordan ran an editorial that made the analogy between the Iraqi Shi'is and the Nicaraguan Contras of Reagan infamy. Suggesting that American policy was designed to overthrow Hussein, this article asserted that "the task of these 'contras' will be to attack the Iraqi army in Baghdad and other cities while the Americans secure the skies...." It concludes with the question whether American policy is "hoping to establish a new and expanded Baghdad pact combining the Gulf states, Turkey, Iran and Iraq with Egypt and whichever other Arab countries might want to join"? [Ref. 63:p. 26] Again, the image of nefarious imperial or superpower intentions and manipulation springs from these articles and the perceived actions of the West.

### **C. ARMS CONTROL**

In a RAND report written in the fall of 1990 for U.S. Central Command regarding postwar force requirements in the

Persian Gulf, the authors specifically recommended a "role for focused diplomacy and arms control in increasing the stability of the Gulf region in the wake of the recent crisis." [Ref. 64:p. 27] Echoing this sentiment in his immediate postwar address to Congress, President Bush announced that the reduction of arms proliferation in the Middle East would be a fundamental goal of American policy in the region. This call was met with great approval on capital hill and, on 29 May 1991, the President proposed an initiative that would restrain arms transfers, freeze ballistic missile development and set the course for the development of conventions on nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in the region.

As in other areas, however, the administration's approach was gradualist, eschewing calls from Congress for an arms moratorium in favor of a modest attempt to introduce the notion of arms control that would hamper the efforts of radical regional powers to acquire greater military capabilities while not interfering with U.S. efforts to strengthen its friends. [Ref. 65:p. 86]

In October 1991, the five major arms suppliers to the region (also the five permanent members of the UN Security Council) agreed on some guidelines for arms transfers. While "impressive" on paper, these guidelines had no means to force compliance, did not include other arms exporters such as North Korea, Argentina and Brazil, and became increasingly difficult to abide by given shrinking domestic defense budgets. [Ref. 65:pp. 86-87] By March 1992, The Economist noted that the

...bid to rein back a conventional arms race in the region has failed. But it is not the rogue sellers

who are mainly responsible. The voluntary constraints, promoted by George Bush after the Gulf war, were designed to prevent the sale of certain weapons to certain countries. The unrespectable though unnamed foursome are Iraq, Iran, Libya and Syria. The constraints have not checked the hot competition among America, Britain and France to sell all sorts of weapons to Arab countries considered respectable: the cuts in domestic defence spending have made export markets essential. [Ref. 66:p. 48]

Saudi Arabia has embarked on a considerable buildup with plans to triple its armed forces to 200,000 men. Given the nation's indigenous population of just 6.7 million, it is questionable whether the country has the ability to absorb and assimilate the arms hardware on order. [Ref. 67:p. 530] Similarly, although to a much lesser extent, other GCC nations have been buying first rate military equipment from Western governments eager to maintain their fledgling defense industries at home. [Ref. 67:p. 530]

The two most recent and highly publicized sales to Gulf states have been the major arms purchases by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait this past fall. In early September, President Bush announced the Administration's intent to sell 72 F-15 advanced fighters to Saudi Arabia. Coming amidst his campaign for reelection, the move was seen in many circles as an electoral ploy. [Ref. 68] Similarly, about a month later, Kuwait agreed to purchase 236 M1-A2 advanced main battle tanks from the U.S. after intense competition between British and American companies for the contract. Ultimately, top American political leadership, including the President himself, weighed

in to ensure the sale went to the United States. "To have this kind of public display of Administration support is unprecedented," said one Pentagon official. "Mind you, though, if there were ever a country over which to exercise a certain leverage, it was Kuwait." [Ref. 69] There are also reports that the UAE is interested in buying 390 new tanks as well. [Ref. 69]

These sales have completely undermined Western (particularly American) attempts to restrict arms sales to Iran and the other "unrespectable" nations. In fact, China has left the Middle East talks because of the large American sale to Taiwan of F-16s. [Ref. 70:p. 13] Even America's European allies are resisting demands to halt sales of militarily useful equipment to Iran. [Ref. 71] If successful, though, "it does not go far enough, for Iran still has access to other armorers, including Russia, China and North Korea. And pinching off these sources of supply will not be possible until western arms salesmen make some additional sacrifices." [Ref. 70:p. 13] The well-publicized expansion of Iran's military forces in the Gulf, including Russian submarines and advance combat aircraft, would indicate that any prospect of meaningful arms control in the region is dim at best. As the arms race in the Gulf reaches unprecedented levels, the implications for stability become increasingly ominous.



#### **D. BORDER DISPUTES**

As mentioned above, there seems to be a consensus of sorts among GCC leaders that the sooner the Gulf states begin to integrate their six nations on all levels, the better off everyone will be. When it comes to the practical application, as evidenced by an inability to reach an agreement on a future, multilateral security arrangement, the GCC has been unable to make any concrete moves in that direction. Ruling family rivalries and fears that such moves would erode both sovereign and personal power seem to be the main culprit.

Indeed, events in the past year would suggest that rather than moving together, the Arab states of the Arabian peninsula are splitting apart. A number of incidents have been made public regrading two longstanding border disputes between Bahrain and Qatar (over the Hawar Islands) and between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In the latter case, gunfire was exchanged along a border post between Saudi and Qatar forces on two occasions at the end of September 1992. [Ref. 72] Some observers commented that what was most unusual about the incidents is that Doha went public about it, "further undermining the pretence that the Gulf Cooperation Council is cohesive enough to pursue the kind of long-term integration to which so many of its citizens aspire." [Ref. 73:p. 5] Renewed problems over the boundary between Oman and Saudi Arabia have added to this problem as well.

Perhaps to demonstrate its frustration with the inability of the GCC to handle these conflicts, Qatar has in the past year been courting Iranian diplomatic initiatives. In fact, Qatar boycotted a GCC annual conference of defense ministers held in Kuwait in mid-November 1992 and there is talk that Doha will boycott the annual GCC summit to be held in Abu Dhabi in December 1992. At the same time, Qatar sent her Ambassador back to Teheran. [Ref. 74:p. 9] Furthermore, Qatar last year negotiated a number of economic cooperation agreements with Iran including plans for a multi-billion dollar freshwater pipeline from the Qarun River in Iran to Qatar. [Ref. 73:p. 6]

Adding to these intra-GCC strains, Iran has posed a direct challenge to these states in its moves to annex the disputed islands of Abu Musa (jointly shared by Iran and UAE since 1971 when the Shah's government occupied the islands). Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the ambiguous situation that had developed under the Shah was continued, and essentially allowed each country to claim sovereignty. This contradiction was not challenged until April 1992 when Iranian authorities expelled 100 UAE workers that did not possess Iranian visas. The issue reemerged when Iran again refused to allow foreigners to enter the islands without Iranian visas in late August 1992. [Ref. 75] In September, Iran began construction on a military airfield and facilities for the establishment of Scud missile batteries as well as radar stations. Teheran

accompanied this with the evacuation of hundreds of Arabs from the island to the UAE, thus affecting a de facto annexation of the island. [Ref. 76:p. 5]

The Arab League issued a statement on 14 September 1992 criticizing Iran's "illegitimate occupation of Abu Musa," and declared support for the UAE if she chose to bring the matter up to the UN. [Ref. 75] Talks between UAE and Iran broke down at the end of the month. Since then, the GCC and Arab allies have taken an increasingly assertive stand toward Iran on the issue as a means, some have suggested, of shoring up the disarray that has afflicted them since the Gulf war. [Ref. 76:p. 5] Additionally, there is no doubt that GCC rulers are viewing, with increasing concern, the Iranian expansion across the Gulf. Egypt, for her part, is using the dispute in an attempt to revive the Damascus Declaration. [Ref. 77:p. 5]

Iran's response to Arab condemnation has been to bring anti-American rhetoric into the discussion. Following the announcement of U.S. support for the UAE, Iran's religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, announced that the dispute was a "conspiracy" engineered by Washington "to justify its illegitimate presence in the Persian Gulf." [Ref. 78] The Iranians are not the only ones to make such an observation, however. A Jordanian commentator noted in April 1992 that as

...the Arabs were preoccupied with the revival of their longstanding quarrels, Iran--without fanfare, and in proximity to the American and British fleets

that patrol the Gulf--went ahead and completed its occupation of Abu Musa Island, which belongs to the UAE. [Ref. 79:p. 21]

The allusion, of course, is that while the Westerners were aware of the action and had the means to prevent it, they allowed the occupation to continue in order to justify their expanded presence in the Gulf. This editorial concluded that

...these inter-Arab borders are not being ignited suddenly for no reason. The aim is to make permanent the current state of Arab disintegration and increase the fear which prompts some to adhere to America as their supreme protector and guardian. Especially as most of the borders concerned in the Peninsula and Gulf are in areas that contain the oil which the US needs so badly. [Ref. 79:p. 22]

This perception of an American hand in these disputes has been expanded to the Arab world in general by other Arab commentators:

These developments in the Arab world, and the fossilization of certain vindictive and domineering attitudes, make us fear that the process of disintegration in the Arab nation will continue. It seems that the "prophecy" of the orientalist Bernard Lewis about the demise of Arab nationalism and joint Arab action is not a coincidence, but an accurate description of a plan that is being put into practice by certain Arab circles connected to the United States. The conspiracy aims not only at tearing the Arab world apart and building impenetrable walls between its peoples, but at dismembering some of the Arab states which dared take independent and principled stands during the aggression against Iraq. [Ref. 80:p. 20]

Analyzing each of the military initiatives that the United States has undertaken since the end of the Gulf war, it is difficult to argue against the legitimacy of those actions on an individual basis. Indeed, there were very good reasons for U.S. threatening moves toward Saddam Hussein in order to

enforce UN sanctions. The naval posturing in the Persian Gulf in response to Iran's acquisition of Russian submarines also seems very appropriate under the circumstances. Similarly, the establishment of Operation Southern Watch, whether one argues on humanitarian grounds or simply to apply more pressure on Hussein, can be defended within the confines of the specific issue. One may even argue, with some justification, that arms sales to Saudi Arabia, et al., are critical for their self-defense in this dynamic region. These contentions are especially pertinent in the wake of a war that many believe occurred because the United States disengaged from the region too quickly after the Iran-Iraq war.

The difficulty with these arguments is that they do not address the whole picture that is being presented. These initiatives, while appearing legitimate from the American perspective, take on a different form when seen as a compilation of actions that Western nations have been doing for decades in pursuit of their own interests. The expanded Western military presence in the Gulf is seen by many Arabs as simply another manifestation of the imperialist ventures that have penetrated their world for centuries. And while the overt presence may deter an external aggressor such as Iran, it may at the same time be undermining the very basis of stability of the pro-American regimes in power. In other words, American policy in the region is focusing so much on the external threats that it is neglecting internal challenges

to U.S. interests. Moreover, that overemphasis may be unknowingly aiding internal forces that would overthrow the pro-American regimes. Indeed, the record of American policy in the Middle East since the end of World War II does not suggest that the U.S. had been particularly sensitive to this in the past.

Richard K. Herrmann contends, in an essay on American policy in the Middle East in the post cold war era, that

...superior military power may protect U.S. interests, but regional security that is based simply on Washington's ability to intimidate and project coercive influence will be politically vulnerable. It will reinforce local perceptions of the United States as an imperial power and last only as long as the United States can afford and is willing to sustain the power asymmetry. [Ref. 81:p. 69]

The negotiations of bilateral defense treaties and the considerable arms sales to the GCC regimes increases the "intimacy" of the relationship between the United States and the ruling families. Herrmann notes that it "deepens the association between Washington and the regimes with which it is allied. In an era of rising mass politics this can undermine the legitimacy of these allied regimes and become a source of instability in its own right." [Ref. 81:p. 70] He warns that while

...unilateral American security assistance contributes to the deterrence function...a highly visible U.S. military presence is often a lightning rod for populist opposition. This is an old problem for the United States in the Gulf and it is a dilemma that the Gulf War did not solve. [Ref. 81:pp. 71-72]

This chapter has tried to demonstrate the perception that our expanded military presence and visibility has created in the Middle East. It is not difficult for opposition groups in the GCC societies to translate this perception into anti-imperialist symbols which can be used to mobilize support. On a more specific plane, Abdulaziz Bashir and Stephen Wright echo Herrmann's thesis in their essay on Saudi Arabian foreign policy after the Gulf War.

In short, given Western assistance to and support for Saudi Arabia, its security from external aggression appears to be well covered, although possibly at a longer-term price in terms of providing grounds for opposition based on Islamic sensitivities to such arrangements. [Ref. 52:p. 111]

American policy is oriented toward an external threat (as it was during the Cold War) because it is relatively easy to identify and deter. It is the internal disruptions which have traditionally posed the most problems for our policies in the Middle East. There is nothing to indicate this will not be the same in the future, and to focus on external, near-term challenges both neglects and ultimately undermines the internal stability of the pro-American regimes in power.

This is not to argue for a military disengagement from the Persian Gulf. It is rather to suggest that we should not appear to rely so heavily on organized violence, or the threat of organized violence, to protect our interests. We should deemphasize the military component of American policy in the region if by no other means than decreasing the visibility of

our forces, moving back to an "over-the-horizon" presence. The demonstration of America's military capability and technological superiority during the Gulf War should have a considerable deterrent effect on would-be aggressors for at least the near future. Iranian leaders cannot ignore the fact that a predominantly American force decimated in half-a-dozen weeks an Iraqi army that the Iranians fought to a standstill for eight years at the loss of a million men. In other words, in the post cold war era, it is doubtful that the United States will even require such an overwhelming presence in order to deter a regional aggressor. More importantly, though, the expanded presence threatens to undermine the very foundation of stability that it is trying to maintain.



## V. CONCLUSION

...the war cannot be properly understood as simply a failure in U.S. deterrence policy. It reflected the failure of a political strategy that relied too heavily on deterrence. Washington was preoccupied with deterring Iran and lost sight of the intra-Arab politics that were polarizing the region. It put too little emphasis on developing a sophisticated political strategy toward regional security and ultimately was forced to rely on overwhelming military superiority. [Ref. 81:p. 43]

As stated previously, it should be emphasized that the preceding discussion is not necessarily predicting the pending demise of the Gulf Arab monarchies. They have in the past shown considerable resilience to both internal and external challenges to their stability. This is particularly apparent when considered relative to some of their northern Arab and Persian neighbors. In large part, this is probably due to the oil wealth they have accrued and the ability for rulers to distribute it in order to maintain their own political viability. Times are changing, however, and it would be tragic for American policy makers to be lulled into a false sense that simply because these shaykhdoms are economically prosperous, they are politically stable. Eric Hooglund demonstrates the potential consequences of this kind of thinking in his essay on American policy toward Iran. "By the late 1960s, policymakers in Washington were interpreting Iran's prosperity, induced by oil revenues, as evidence of political

stability and were perceiving the shah as a valuable ally in the Middle East region." [Ref. 45:p. 212] The problem was that the shah was not moving to reform the political system in order to incorporate various social groups into the decision-making process. Policy makers in Washington "assumed that the types of reforms instituted by the shah would lead eventually to broader political participation and thus to political stability, this did not happen." [Ref. 45:p. 211] President Carter's toast to Iran's stability on the even of revolution underlines Washington's ignorance of the internal political and social atmosphere.

It would appear today that the United States is making the same assumption with the states of the GCC. By focusing on the external, perceived Iranian threat, the U.S. is choosing military instruments to counter and deter this threat. These instruments, however, cannot effectively counter internal challenges to American interests. If policy makers continue to ignore the internal problems associated with modernization and global change, American interests will only suffer. Bernard Lewis observes, in a recent Foreign Affairs article, that

The policy adopted so far, in order to prevent such a [regional] hegemony, is to encourage, arm and when necessary support a regional and therefore mainly Arab security pact. This policy inevitably evokes the unhappy memory of earlier attempts, which do more harm than good. This time the proposed pact has a somewhat better chance. The presumed enemy is no longer the redoubtable Soviet Union, and regional rulers are taking a more sober view of the world and their place

in it. But such a pact, based on unstable regimes ruling volatile societies, is inherently precarious, and the chain is no stronger than its weakest link. The recent history of Iraq illustrates the different ways that such a policy can go wrong. By embracing the monarchy, we procured its overthrow; by fostering Saddam Hussein, we nurtured a monster. It would be fatally easy to repeat either or both these errors, with considerable risk to our interests in the region and terrible consequences for the people who live there. [Ref. 82:p. 111]

This thesis has tried to demonstrate how developing societies of the Arabian peninsula are vulnerable to internal political instability and how American policy can, unknowingly, contribute to that instability. As these societies continue to modernize and old structures of the traditional system breakdown, more and more groups become available for political mobilization. Indeed, with rising awareness and expectations, they begin to demand more say in the conduct and future of their society. A sentiment increasingly echoed in the Arab world,

...suggests that the key to defining Arab participation in the new Middle East will come, in the end, not from rulers, but from the ruled. Internal renewal--or failing that, revolution--seems likely to be the vehicle for generating a more confident and effective Arab response to the challenges of global change. [Ref. 83]

The problem is that the ruling families of the Gulf appear reluctant to expand the political system to assimilate new groups demanding more say in the process. They are grasping at the old institutions and traditional means of governing Arabian society and neglecting the inevitable demand for greater participation. Only reluctantly, due to pressures

created by the Gulf war, have some of these regimes moved to form institutions which give the appearance of political reform. If history is an indicator, these experiments in participatory institutions will fail, or at most, serve as facades of political development.

If emerging groups in these societies continue to be excluded from the decision-making process, they will become increasingly available for mobilization by various ideologies. In the past it was Arab nationalism, today it may well be Islamic fundamentalism or even a more particularist form of liberal nationalism. Regardless, these ideologies draw upon the discontent created by the social upheaval associated with modernization and use symbols to mobilize support in opposition to regimes. In the Middle Eastern experience, the most powerful symbol has been anti-imperialism. Discussing the role of Islamic fundamentalism in the 1990s, Bernard Lewis notes that,

The eclipse of pan-Arabism has left Islamic fundamentalism as the most attractive alternative to all those who feel that there has to be something better, truer and more hopeful than the inept tyrannies of their rulers and the bankrupt ideologies foisted on them from outside. These movements feed on privation and humiliation and on the frustration and resentments to which they give rise, after the failure of all the political and economic nostrums, both foreign imports and the local imitations. As seen by many in the Middle East and North Africa, both capitalism and socialism were tried and have failed; both Western and Eastern models produced only poverty and tyranny. It may seem unjust that in Algeria, for example, the West should be blamed for the pseudo-Stalinist policies of an anti-Western government, for the failure of the one and the ineptitude of the other. But popular

sentiment is not entirely wrong in seeing the Western world and Western ideas as the ultimate source of the major changes that have transformed the Islamic world in the last century or more. As a consequence much of their anger is directed against the Westerner, seen as the ancient and immemorial enemy of Islam since before the Crusades, and against the Westernizer, seen as a tool or accomplice of the West and as a traitor to his own people. [Ref. 82:p. 115]

Indeed, it was this symbol and perception that mobilized ideologically diverse elements in Iranian society to overthrow the shah in 1979.

By the 1970s, the image of the United States that had taken hold among those Iranians disaffected with the royal dictatorship was that of a superpower exploiting Iran's resources and strategic position for its own benefit. The shah's diverse religious and secular opponents accused him of being little more than a U.S. puppet, a leader serving the interests of U.S. economic and military interests to the detriment of Iran. [Ref. 45:p. 219]

Today, the popular perception of the link between American military power and the political survival of the GCC ruling families (magnified by the Gulf War), is one that should not be ignored nor underestimated.

#### **A. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the above, the following policy recommendations should be considered.

##### **1. Greater Awareness**

American policy makers need to be more aware of the perception that the U.S. military-oriented policy is creating in the Gulf today and what that perception can do to the political stability of the pro-American regimes. Get away

from the success of Desert Storm and the idea that interests can be protected by military force alone. While each action that the U.S. has taken in the region since the Gulf war can probably be justified on its own individual merits, the actions should be viewed together as an entire package. The image that emerges is one of overwhelming military force. It gives the appearance to inhabitants of the region of the same old monolithic imperial penetration of the area that they have been dealing with for a hundred years. Whether that is reality or not matters little if that image can be used to ferment political instability.

Accompanying this should be an increased focus on internal domestic political developments and a greater awareness that American interests are probably more threatened from an internal challenge than from an external aggressor. The heavy reliance on military power to protect U.S. interests since the Gulf war suggests that the focus remains outward.

## 2. Reduce the Imperial Perception

Lower the profile of American forces in the region if by no other way than to reduce the publicity. This does not mean disengage. It means simply go back to an "over-the-horizon" presence. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there is no external actor that is capable of achieving hegemony in the Gulf. Only regional powers may challenge the status quo. It is doubtful, however, that Iran would try to challenge American power overtly. Iran's leaders are fully

aware of what U.S. forces did to Iraq's million-man army, as well as the drubbing their own forces took during the clashes in the Gulf during the late 1980s. Further, in a crisis stern messages can be delivered through diplomatic (third party) channels, if necessary, to demonstrate political and military resolve. Additionally, Iranian leaders are cognizant of the presence of American forces over the horizon through their own military sensors. It is the leadership that needs to be deterred, not the mass of Muslims in the region.

A more effective means for Iran to undermine American influence in the Gulf would be to subvert pro-American regimes by using the expanded U.S. military presence as a means to mobilize anti-Western sentiment. If the U.S. reduces the public symbolic value of the military presence, much of the ideological appeal of the Iranian message is lost.

### 3. Encourage Political Reform

Continue to encourage GCC regimes, both publicly and privately, to reform their political system in order to expand political participation within the societies. The motivations here are pragmatic rather than altruistic, because political reform will incorporate potentially destabilizing social groups in society. If they are not brought into the system, they may turn to other means to express their views. There is, of course, difficulty in this. Inevitably, political reform will mean a loss of influence and power for the ruling family and many are likely to oppose real change.

#### 4. Arms Control

Reduce arms sales to the region and work to establish a real arms control regime. Until some efforts are made in this direction, there will be no means to control the Iranian expansion diplomatically. Further, these nations, including Saudi Arabia, for a variety of reasons, are not capable of defending themselves against a determined regional aggressor. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait demonstrated how ill-prepared these nations (despite the possession of sophisticated weapon systems) were to counter that threat. The only visible way that these countries are going to establish a credible military force is to make real strides toward integration. For the moment the prospects for this appear dim. American policy should instead concentrate on lower level security assistance that builds on infrastructure and forms indigenous forces that are capable of countering some kind of internal coup or unrest. It should also encourage GCC discussion and movement toward integration.

#### 5. Peace Process

This final issue is important because the Arab-Israeli dispute "underlies and permeates the other problems of the region, and for which a solution is critical to ensure enduring peace and security." [Ref. 48:p. 9] Genuine American efforts to push this forward on an evenhanded level can go a long way toward improving the overall image of the United States in the region. Currently the talks appear to be



faltering due, many believe, to an American preoccupation with domestic elections. It is important to aggressively reinvigorate the process through active participation. If the talks fail, it will undoubtedly lead to increased political radicalization and instability throughout the entire region.

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